

HEARING THE VOICES OF MARRIED AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS AS
THEY DESCRIBE THEIR SONS' EXPERIENCES WITH WHITE TEACHERS IN
URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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December 2017

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted as a qualitative study of five married middle-income African American mothers' perception of their African American sons' White teachers in an urban secondary school district. The study was intended to hear the voices and perceptions of the five African American mothers' who have or had a son who attended a secondary urban school in their community. The African American mothers would share their perceptions their sons' personal interaction with their White teachers. The first purpose of this study was to broaden the limited research on mothers' perception of White teachers' interaction with their African American male students. The second purpose was to investigate the challenges that African American male students face with their White teachers. The results revealed that mothers perceived White teachers demonstrated: (a) lack of interactions with African American males, (b) lack of care towards African American males, (c) a lack of cultural competence, (d) the teachers' lack of understanding of the mothers' preparation of the success of their children, (e) preferential treatment toward students, and (f) low expectations for students.

This study contains actual conversations of the mothers' narratives. The data collected in the study was collected through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and open-ended questions.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother, Patricia Ann Price. Her passion for me to have an education has been my strength and inspiration. Mom, I truly miss you and will always be grateful for your encouragement and support towards my education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for the opportunity He has blessed me with throughout this endeavor. I would like to thank my wonderful husband, Dr. Otoniel Marrero for his devoted love, patience, and encouragement. His support and sacrifices allowed me to pursue my education and travel the world. To my darling sons, Emilio Marrero and Andres Marrero, thank you so much for your understanding and love during this journey. I love you all dearly. I also would like to thank all of BSF leaders and classmates for their constant prayers and encouragement, I appreciate all of the support over the years. I thank God for all of you.

The members of my committee have been very supportive and resourceful during this journey. I extend a sincere thank you to my chair and advisor, Dr. Norvella P. Carter, who has been like a mother to me throughout my studies. I am very grateful and appreciative for the many times she has advocated on my behalf and encouraged me to be the leader that I am today. I thank Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan for her kindness, support and guidance over the years. I would like to thank Dr. Kamala Williams, whose has been a dear in working with me professionally and personally with genuine advice and encouragement which helped me on the right path. Thank you, Dr. Larry Kelly, for your help and opportunity to see new perspectives of my research.

Thanks also go to my friends and colleagues and the department faculty and staff for making my time at Texas A&M University a wonderful experience.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Professors Norvella Carter and Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan of the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture and Educational Administration and Human Development. Professor(s) Larry Kelly and Kamala Williams of the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture.

All work for the dissertation was completed by the student, under the advisement of Norvella Carter of the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture.

Funding Sources

There are no outside funding contributions to acknowledge related to the research and compilation of this document.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Theoretical Framework	5
Personal Experience	18
Statement of the Problem	21
Purpose of the Study	22
Significance of the Study	23
Research Questions	24
Definition of Terms	24
Summary	25
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE	27
Historical Background	27
Mothers of African American Sons	33
Urban Schools	42
Ethics of Care	74
Teacher Efficacy and Beliefs	75
Summary	81
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	84
Introduction	84
Phenomenology	84

Research Design	85
Background of the District	86
Participants	88
Criteria.....	89
Procedures	90
Positionality.....	90
Data Collection.....	92
Tape Recordings.....	93
Field Notes	93
Non-verbal Cues.....	93
Data Analysis	94
Trustworthiness and Credibility	95
Member Checking	95
Transferability	95
Dependability and Confirmability.....	96
Summary	96
 CHAPTER IV RESEARCH FINDINGS	 97
Profile of Participants.....	98
Presentation of the Themes	104
Summary	123
 CHAPTER V SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	 126
Discussions of Findings	128
Research Question One	129
Research Question Two	134
Research Question Three	136
Conclusions	138
Recommendations	139
Implications for Future Research	140
Summary	142
 REFERENCES.....	 144
 APPENDIX A	 164
 APPENDIX B	 165

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Ideal instructional practice and teaching styles which foster the academic success of African American students.	63
Figure 2. A comparison of African American learning styles with the learning practices within the school environment.	65

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants.	99

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the United States of America during the twenty-first century, the academic achievement of African American students continues to be a challenge in American schools (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Ford & Moore, 2013; Nieto, 2010). African American male students continue to lag behind in academics compared to their White counterparts (NCES, 2013). Education scholars commonly refer to this issue in terms of an “achievement gap.” According to the Nation Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the achievement gap occurs when “one group of students, “outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant” (NCED, 2013). The groups are commonly based on ethnicity and gender. However, the National Governors’ Association (NGA) defines the achievement gap as an issue of race and class with the gap existing among students of color, disadvantaged students and their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In addition to disparities among racial/ethnic groups and among different economic status, another achievement gap exists between urban and non-urban schools. Despite the definitions, there is a vast achievement gap in urban school districts in the United States.

There have been some educational gains in the United States within the second half of the twentieth century. However, African American males continue to lag behind other students in high school completion and overall achievement (Center for Educational

Policy, 2010). The United States and 34 other nations make up the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD exists to support policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of its citizens globally. One of their primary objectives is the education of the masses. Despite its membership in the organization, the United States is the sole member nation that fails to provide equal access to education for its population. The NCES (2015) noted the dropout rate for African American students fell from 13 to 7 percent from 1990 and 2013; however, the dropout rate for African American students in urban schools has been as high as 50 percent, an alarmingly high proportion. “Between 1990 and 2014, the percentage of Whites who had attained at least a high school diploma or its equivalent remained higher than that of Blacks and Hispanics” (NCES, 2015, p. 3). Although the gap in this level of educational attainment has been drastically cut from 8 to 4 percent in the period above, this has not led to an increase in post-secondary enrollment for African American male students. African American men account for only 4.3% of the total enrollment at 4-year postsecondary institutions in the United States (Milner, 2014).

Over a span of 24 years, the gap separating Whites and Blacks in attaining a bachelor's or higher degree increased by 5 percentage points and the gap between Whites and Hispanics increased by 8 percentage points (NCES, p. 3). Out of the 35 members of the OECD, the United States ranks 12th and 11th respectively in the percentage of 25 to 34-year-olds completing a Type A or Type B Tertiary Degree. The study also found that undergraduate enrollment, enrollment in 4-year colleges, college continuation rates, and

bachelor's degree attainment were prevalent among higher income households of which African American constitute a lower percentage (Cahalan & Perna, 2015).

The causes for the lack of academic outcomes for African American students are longstanding and complex. Since at least 1896, when segregation became law of the land after *Plessy vs Ferguson*, African Americans have been forced to take the blame for underperformance in spite of a long history of inequality and discrimination (Howard, 2015; Gordon 2012). However, according to Ford & Moore (2013), our school systems have created a test score gap and used the term achievement gap in a deficit framework. Despite the circumstances, teachers are expected to maintain a successful learning environment for all students. However, researchers have found that deficit mindsets and language are an interwoven part of our classrooms nationwide and are hindering the learning of African American students, particularly males (Howard, 2013; Gordon 2012). These patterns of institutional racism in the classroom impact the scholarship of African American males and create racial tension in today's society (James 2011; Kuykendall, 2012; Sleeter, 2012).

During 1865, the Freedman's Bureau adopted the mission to educate all students, yet research continues to demonstrate that the United States education system was not prepared with the skills, knowledge, or desire to create an environment for equitable educational experiences of all students, especially children of color. (Anderson, 2007; Kozol, 2012; Ford & Moore, 2013; Howard, 2013; Moore & Lewis, 2014).

Questions of equity are forcing educators to revisit the underlying reasons why many African American students are experiencing difficulties in schools, specifically

difficulty in academic achievement (Ford & Moore, 2013; Gordon, 2012). Although parents and families have been blamed for the lack of academic success in mass for their children, African American parents have historically put a high value on education (Ford, 2010). According to Banks (2004), education as a gateway to a better life was a primary motivator for African Americans to seek education, so African American families tended to prize educational opportunities.

In an effort to ensure children's success in schools, even before integration and especially now, middle-income African American mothers have made difficult, but purposeful decisions based on beliefs about the best interests of their children. Often, given their income levels, they move to suburban towns and prestigious city communities and enroll their children in schools they perceive to be on the cutting edge of academic achievement. However, these middle-income parents report obstacles of educational opportunities despite strategic planning for their children, including a lack of teacher-student connections, police violence, and ongoing patterns of racism in school and society (Williams, 2009; Wallace, 2013). Researchers have found that student and teacher relationships are not prevalent in large urban schools when the majority of the students are of color and have low-income backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2015). However, parents in suburban towns and top-notch city schools are experiencing some of the same challenges of educating their African American children as their inner city counterparts (Williams, 2009; Kozol, 2012; Weis, 2013).

With recent killings of African American males and media spotlights on young, Black men being shot by other citizens or by police officers, parents are riveting with the

continuing, deep reminder that racism still exists in our society and educational system (Alexander, 2010; Parham & McDavis, 1987).

Therefore, this research explored how African American mothers make meaning of their sons' education in predominantly White urban teaching environments and through it all, African American parents, mothers in particular, have had to shoulder these burdens while still encouraging their sons to excel. This discourse was grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and conceptualized through teacher efficacy and beliefs.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The framework guiding this research is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory originated in the legal field founded by Derrick Bell during the 1970's. Bell argued that race and racism needed to serve as an important critique of the U.S. political, social and historical structures to better describe the social and injustice that existed within schools (Crenshaw, 1995). Similar to its foundational work in law, CRT has moved across disciplines including entering into the field of education where scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate acknowledge race and racism as contributing to social injustices in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Milner (2007) describes CRT as an oppositional framework against traditional scholarship that often ignores and/or downplays both the historical and contemporary effects of race and racism with American students of color in public schools across the United States. Some critical race scholars (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007;

Lynn & Dixon 2013) contended that the introduction of CRT in the field of education was essential and timely in that it provided a critical critique of the poor and inequitable schooling experience of students of color. It challenges the dominant dialogue of race and racism in education by looking at how educational theory and pedagogy are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ortiz & Jani, 2012).

Therefore, using CRT as a theoretical framework, it provides educational scholars, educators, and parents the opportunity to talk about race and racial inequalities that become ingrained within the social structure of the United States and reflecting the society including our secondary classrooms.

Tenets of CRT

The five tenets of CRT in education identified by Delgado & Stefancic (2001) include: (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (2) the challenge to the dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the interdisciplinary perspective. For the purpose of this study, however, only two tenets of CRT are explored: interest convergence and narrative storytelling.

Interest Convergence Principle of CRT

The third tenet of CRT, the commitment to social justice, calls for a re-examination of social systems, such as legal, educational, and media, and asks how these systems establish social policies that produce and normalize racial discrimination (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While committed to social justice, the critical race framework exposes the

interest convergence of civil rights gains in education and seeks to operate its research agenda towards eradicating racism, class oppression, poverty and to empower people of color as well as other marginalized groups and communities to eliminate inter-connected structures of oppression (Solorzano, 2001).

This framework exposes the inequalities and inadequacies in public schools (Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Jay, 2003) and seeks to improve the achievement gap for students. In order to understand inequalities and inadequacies in schools, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) linked race and property as a significant construct. Their research indicates that racism accounts for inequalities such as suspension and dropout rates among students of color, more specifically, African American males. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also connects residential property values to the quality of schools. This connection shows how poverty and low social status is racialized among some people of color that have access to property with lower values (Lynn & Parker, 2006). This in turn, affects the quality of the public schools that are in the area.

According to Jay (2003), the interest convergence examines the hidden racial curricula in schools. She argues that schools should use a progressive multicultural curriculum that is inclusive to all students. Likewise, Lynn and Parker (2006) argues schools should create a more inclusive curriculum and policy that embrace students of color, instead of a White academic hegemony that has shaped the discourse on education and the achievement gap.

Researchers have studied the experiences of African American males and the inequalities in education they face on daily basis. Duncan (2003) found that African

American males were subject to subtle yet hurtful microaggression. Microaggression is defined as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). For African American males and other racially marginalized students, microaggressive behaviors often leave them feeling inadequate which eventually can cause their level of performance to drop in school.

A study was conducted by DeCuri and Dixon (2004) examining the impact of racism on African American students who attended a predominately White private school. The study concluded that the interest convergence principles occurs when the social and civil rights of African American students are only valued when Whites have a personal gain. (DeCuri & Dixon, 2004). This occurs in instances when African American males are recruited as athletes. Furthermore, in the case of African American scholar athletes, perceptions are made of them exclusively as asset to the sports team. The academic qualifications are often ignored.

Finally, researchers found under interest convergence principles of CRT, a concept of colorblindness. According to DeCuri & Dixon (2004), colorblindness is the conception that color is not seen or used when making a variety of judgments. However, their study concluded that the school softens racial incident with disciplinary ramifications. In addition, African American students were the only ones subject to follow the school rules. Schools districts with an increasingly number of African American students and students of color should try to understand the history and culture of these students. Race and culture are important should be considered when considering the academic achievement of

African American male students. One of the major steps in addressing these issues is recognizing that race is a factor even in elite school settings.

Counter Storytelling

Storytelling is an essential tenet of CRT. This tenet recognizes the experiential knowledge or the voices of African Americans. Storytelling is a reliable source for critically examining the stories of society's dominant class (Ladson-Billings & Yosso, 2005). The use of counter-stories is appropriate and critical in analyzing certain phenomena which provide students of color a voice to tell their narratives regarding marginalized experiences that would otherwise remain unknown and unheard (Eggleston & Miranda, 2009; and Hiraldo, 2010). This tenet of CRT gives voice to the marginalized through hearing their stories through various forms of societal/family communication and expressions. Students frequently share these in the classroom.

According to Ladson-Billings (1998), counter storytelling can be used to expose the ideologies of the dominant culture about race which disseminated racial stereotypes of marginalized groups and also connect the experience of others who share in the similar plight. Storytelling focuses on the lived experience of African Americans. It illustrates the struggles and challenges students have experience in society. Society tends to blame students of color and their parents for their failures in school. These schools are inadequate in their abilities to serve the majority of the students in becoming successful and productive members of the larger society.

CRT is applicable to this study for it relates to the race factor being examined. Specifically, CRT addresses the research questions of whether race may influence the

interactions White teachers have with African American male students. Therefore, CRT can be used as an existing theory upon which this study can build.

Part of what this study entails is based on the notion that race in urban schools' controls how they operate on a routine basis. It also guides how African American mothers' describes issues of domination, oppression and social injustice for their sons' in the classrooms. Using critical race theory as the theoretical base for inquiry about African American mothers describing their sons' experiences in predominantly White urban schools and the effects of race are presented through narrative storytelling. These stories will give life and essence to the lived experiences of African American males attending urban secondary schools.

Black Feminist Thought

According to Collins (2009), the importance of Black feminist thought is to understand the experiences and ideas shared from the perspective of Black women. Additionally, Black women experiences are theorized from their standpoint of identity, community, and the larger society. Scholars acknowledge that there are various platforms that exist when refereeing Black women's viewpoints as it relates to Black feminist thought. The most prominent lenses formed to study the lived experiences of Black women are, Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins, 2002b/2009). Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995); Womanism (Walker, 1983); and Critical Race Feminism (Wing, 1997). Each of these lenses depicts African American women as agents of change and creators of knowledge. This is particularly evident in the intersecting works contributed by African American women who blur disciplines offers new ways of understanding a collective

experience. Furthermore, for this study, BFT is used to examine and explore the different positions and perspectives of African American mothers. Therefore, Collins (2009) considers four tenets when conceptualizing Black feminist thought for both theory and method: (1) the concept was established based on the daily living experiences of the African American women, (2) African American women share a commonality of combating inequalities of societal issues of racism and sexism, (3) the ethic of caring and (4) the ethic of personal responsibility. All of these tenets certainly convey the work of African American mothers.

Black women have historically been affected by intertwining systems of race, class, and gender oppression. Black women realize that Whites superior status in society is not because of their intellect, talent or humanity, but solely due to advantages of racism (Collins, 2009). Collins (2009) argues “Black women intellectual best contribute to Black women’s group standpoint by using their experience as situated knowers” (p.22). Black feminism solidifies the struggles of Black women and accounts for events from their history. This includes but is not limited to their struggles and contributions.

African American Women and Mothers’ Identity

African American mothers participate in implanting positive self-affirmation for their children in addition to protecting them from systematic racism in a society where they are constantly carrying the burden of being marginalized. African American children are inherently subjected to the negative stereotypes of their mothers. Some scholars have identified African American mothers or poor people of color as “lazy, fatalistic, hedonistic, violent, distrustful, people living in common law unions, as well as

dysfunctional, female-centered, authoritarian families who are chronically unemployed and rarely participate in local civic activities, vote or trust the police and political leaders” (Valencia, 2010, p. 115).

Despite this negative perception of African American mothers, these women are actively involved in their children’s education in a variety of ways. Their involvement may focus more on extracurricular and home-based activities that are not recognized by educators and differs from the traditional parental involvement. According to Collins (2009), challenging these issues and images of African American mothers is the primary motive of Black feminism. Collins notes that the portrayal of “African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mamas helps justify U.S. Black women’s oppression” (2009, p. 47).

African American women are usually negatively affected by societal issues of race and sexism and, under the circumstances, they usually live in disadvantaged environments (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero 2000). The black feminist thought was applied to a guide a study that was conducted by Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) to explore the educational narratives of eight African American women reentry higher education, particularly in graduate and undergraduate programs to explain how their experiences in the larger society influence their learning within the academy. The study concluded that African American woman in higher education and undergraduate studies constantly experienced issues concerning power relations of race, gender, class, and color. Therefore, the authors used Black feminist thought to provide the theoretical framework

to explore the learning environment among women, but more specifically, African American women.

African American women are more educated than ever before in spite of being undeniably undervalued in America in all kinds of ways. One of those ways is that they have not obtained the same educational opportunities as other groups. They are the most educated group in the United States by race and gender (Toldson & Johns 2016). African American women are Black feminist thought helps validates Black woman and recognizes their lived experience as unique, distinct and knowledge-based, despite the dehumanizing forms of oppression they face. African American mothers in low and middle-income levels have not gained the recognition they deserve for having the knowledge and a voice. Their voices are unheard in the literature, schools and in society. General, African American mothers care for their children and want them to be successful in school.

Academic Achievement for African American Males

Since the desegregation in public schools in 1954, for some African American male students have not yet fully benefited to the promises of Brown vs Board of education, the promise of advancement. American Education has improved over the years since the landmark case, but there is still a long way to go for the academic advancement of African American males. In 2016, classrooms worldwide are integrated, but they are not equal. So many of our African American males on every grade level are significantly lagging behind their counterparts. With every effort in reforming education with policies, reconfiguration of schools, charter schools, vouchers, and the federal legislation of Race

to the Top Act (2013), a vast majority of African American males are still lagging behind their counterparts in our educational systems and in society (Noguera, 2003).

The research data indicates failure for the majority of middle school and high school African American males' started from early on in their educational career which prevents some students the ability to graduate from high school. This academic failure hinders the educational progression of African American males' not only in low-income status but also in middle-income families. With respect to *Brown v. the Board of Education* school desegregating schools and creating equal education for all students, we must wonder why so many of our African American males are experiences difficulties in maintaining academic success in middle-income predominantly White urban schools. Researchers have examined the ramifications of the historical Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs the Board of Education*, focusing on understanding whether or not African American students, particularly males, can effectively be taught in an educational system that was designed for their White counterparts. Many scholars analyzed previous studies and found an array of negative results as it pertains to boundaries of desegregation and the education of African American students.

Researchers found that White teachers' expectations varied depending on the race of their students (Gordon, 2012). There is evidence today that students of color, particularly African American male students are still being treated differently. Because African American males' students are treated differently, they end up performing at different levels as their White counterparts. Hearing the voices of middle-income African American mothers about their sons' experience with White teachers, in urban schools that

are well funded, will help broaden the research on analyzing the achievement gap among African American males who have the potential to possess great academic success. It is critical that White urban educators collectively and individually work towards improving the academic achievement for African American male students.

Mothers' Perception of Schools and Social Services

According to the NCES (2013), African American mothers do attend teacher-conferences and PTA meetings on, or above average compared to White parents. Some African American mothers' perceptions of the school are based on their experiences with school and particular past events may shape some of the perceptions. However, studies have shown that parents involved in their child's education tend to decline as they matriculate from primary school into secondary school. The complex structure of high school academia requires parents support and involvement specifically for African American males. Schools must reach out to African American parents to encourage an enhanced relationship and better communication.

There is less communication between the teacher and parent about the academic progress of high school students. Most of the communication occurs when the teacher contacts the parent regarding behavior or academic issues in the classroom (Williams 2009). Some African American parents feel like their sons have not been encouraged enough by their White teachers to achieve academic success (Williams, 2009). Many African American mothers in low and middle-income communities are unsatisfied with the quality of the schools (Fenwich, 2015) and education where their children attend. This low participation of parental engagement in urban schools has often led educators to

conclude that African American parents are uninterested in their children's academic performance (Wasserberg, 2014). Here lies an example where better lines of communication and improved relationships would hinder these false perceptions. Therefore, African American mothers are under the impression that they have no influence on school culture.

There have been few studies that focus on middle-income African American mothers' beliefs about educational experiences with schools, teachers, and the academic abilities of their sons in high school. There are some studies that provide evidence that African American mothers are quite willing to participate in their children's education, unfortunately, some of these studies only include the race and socioeconomic status when examining parental practices in schools. Furthermore, when race and socioeconomic levels are examined, the literature fails to consider middle-income African American parents as part of the analysis.

Most of the literature stems from underprivileged African American students, particularly males and their single mothers. However, Fenwick (2015) did a study collecting data on the parental involvement that included various socioeconomic levels of African American parents. In that study, she found out that when urban schools invited parents to participate, it improved students' outcome. The researcher cannot stress enough how critical it is for parents to take a greater role in the education of their children. Yet, schools find it challenging to reach out to African American parents and some mothers find it difficult to navigate the ways of the school system, especially high school.

Many African American parents believed that the social services of their sons were being neglected and White teachers and administrators had low expectations for their sons (Milner, 2006). Some African American mother believed that their children are incorrectly labeled with having limitations and deficits. These parents often feel that the labels remain with their children throughout the education process and keep them from obtaining a productive education. Parents perceive that teachers hold lower expectations for the students because of these labels.

Segregation Within Desegregated Schools

There is a growing concern with segregation within desegregated schools. In urban middle-income secondary schools, segregation within the school is seen by excluding African American males in advanced placement, honors, gifted and talented courses and an over representation in special education programs. There is a strong correlation between segregation within schools, teacher efficacy and culturally competent. Furthermore, there is also a link between teacher efficacy and the attitudes which teachers portray in the classroom especially the belief in their students' abilities to succeed. Students are not oblivious to these attitudes from their teachers as they may respond with emotions of alienation, low self-esteem, and unexpressed anger. It is concluded that African American male "students are less likely to feel motivated to invest in school when they don't feel as if the teachers care about them" (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges III, & Jennings, 2010, p. 293).

Personal Experience

The author's personal experiences and knowledge of others' experiences are the motives for the development of this study. As an educated middle-income African American mother, I am an insider in respect to the phenomena of the study. This insider position connects me with the racial and gender characteristic I will share with the potential female participants. I am also considered an insider because of the experience I have had advocating on behalf of my sons throughout their educational journeys.

I grew up in the suburbs of Michigan during the 1970's and mid-1980's. I attended urban public schools with predominantly White teachers and staff. For most of my public school experience, I did not feel like the majority of my White teachers liked me or made me feel valued or smart. The majority of them did not support me nor did they show that they believed I was capable of doing the work. The teachers had a lack of encouragement, low expectations and low respect towards my ability to learn. After several conferences with various teachers and principal, my parents undoubtedly concluded that my teachers' perceptions of me obviously affect my school performance. My parents decided to switch me to another school district which was approximately fifteen minutes from our neighborhood, in hopes of finding another school where the teachers believed in educating all students, regardless of their race. In the sixth grade, one of my White teachers, Mrs. Harper (pseudonym) never called on me nor any of the other students of color in the classroom to respond to her questions. We rarely were granted the opportunity to write our answers on the chalkboard during class discussions, she preferred calling only on the White students. Those incidences made me believe that she liked the White students more

than me. Also, I believed that I was not smarter than the other White students in the classroom. I began to disengage myself by not participating in the class discussion or even doing the assignments altogether because I knew that my teacher did not care. My parents began to see the change in my enthusiasm of attending school and became concerned. I was becoming unmotivated and disengaged about learning. The advocacy my parents had towards my education and well-being lead them to question the teacher beliefs about me and my capability to excel in her class. They made a strategic decision to remove me from Mrs. Harper's class and enroll me in a suitable environment for promoting the success of African American students.

I spent much of youth bouncing between three different school districts, five times throughout my educational journey. My parents were looking for a school with educators ready to teach and nurture students of color. I needed a teacher who would take interest in my learning by believing I had the capacity to learn regardless of my race and culture. Eventually, my parents enrolled me into a faith-based Christian school. My teachers were all African American who valued me, embraced my race and culture and most importantly, believed in me.

After nearly 26 years since I attended a suburban public school, I would like to know from African American mothers' if the perceptions of White teachers have changed towards education students of color.

I have two teenage sons attending a predominantly White urban secondary school. The oldest is 17 years of age, a senior in high school, and my younger son is 15 years of age in the 10th grade. They represent 2.6% of the multi-racial ethnic group students

(Cuban and African American) on their school campus. I do not want my sons to face the same challenges as I did when I attended predominantly White urban schools. Unfortunately, in the predominantly White suburban school where my sons attend, I have noticed that some White teachers are constantly underestimating the potential learning capabilities of many African American male students.’ This is certainly a major issue in our public suburban and urban schools today.

My husband and I researched the school district before we moved into the area. We were excited about the state rankings and overall good impressed about the reputation of the school district. Over the last four years, as parents, my husband and I felt that the teachers and administrators did not take the time to get to know our sons or care about them. Our sons are intelligent, they are Eagle Scouts and leaders in our community, however, the teachers and administrators have not held the same level of expectation for them as we do. As parents, we believe our sons are capable of understanding the and doing the coursework in advanced placement classes. However, we have had some major challenges trying to keeping our sons enrolled in advanced placement classes. Ultimately, their teachers did not believe in them nor felt like they could succeed in their classes.

As parents with professional careers and advanced degrees, we have been able to provide the cultural capital needed for our sons to succeed. We have high expectations for our children but have to fight battles after battles to get the best education for them. We believe the teachers do not care enough about our son's’ academic achievement, and we do not believe they have their best interest at heart. I do not believe our story is unique,

but as a researcher, I want to hear the voices of other middle-class African American mothers.

Statement of the Problem

Historically, as a Nation, this country has wrestled with social inequalities regarding race, education, economic status, and gender. African American students are rarely perceived as high achieving students that can perform at high levels of proficiency that will advance them to the next level (Ford, 2012; Harper, 2012; Milner, 2012). Currently, standardized tests continue to report that African American students lag far behind White students (NAEP, 2013). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that the achievement gap scores have increased for 9 and 13-year-olds since the 1970's, however, the performance level has not improved for 17-year-olds (2013).

There is an abundance of studies about poverty level and low-income African American students (Chapman, 2013; Hayes, 2011). However, very few studies have explored married middle-income African American mothers describing their son's' experiences with White teachers in urban secondary classrooms. According to Hayes (2011), too often, parents believe that teachers and administrators have difficulty knowing how to educate their children, because of low expectations and deficit mindsets.

In prior studies about parents, the focus has been on parents of low-income African American students (Chapman, 2013; Hayes, 2011). A large proportion of these studies focused on the over representation of African American students placed in special

education programs and the under-representation of African American students placed in advanced programs.

It is of interest to me that researchers have found that often, parents do not believe teachers hold the principles of social justice as a standard for their African American children (Williams, 2009). Social justice is “a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity” (Nieto, 2010, p. 46). Teachers that embrace social justice can confront the stereotypes and biases that aid inequality and discrimination against African American students. Socially just teachers can implement scholarship that encourages critical thinking and prepares African American students to become productive, successful citizens (Nieto, 2010).

As noted by Harper (2012), African American students have progressed academically over the centuries. Currently, however African American boys appear to have even greater challenges academically than African American female students (Bailey, 2003; Grantham, 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Noguera, 2003). There is a scarcity of research that focuses on hearing the voices of African American mothers, therefore additional studies are warranted.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine and interpret the experiences of middle-income African American mothers as they describe their sons’ experiences with White teachers’ in predominantly White urban secondary classrooms and the parental advocacy they exercised for their sons. Knowing the experiences of African American male students in secondary classrooms could give educators a better understanding of how

to provide essential tools to help these students successfully matriculate to higher education. Such issues of understanding African American males' experiences in secondary classrooms and the lack of support within the system, discrimination and low educational expectations from their teachers have not been significantly explored or considered in the educational system as potential results of high dropout rates or low college enrollment.

For African American males, their lack of matriculating to higher education is greatly influenced by their poor secondary classroom experiences.

Significance of the Study

This study will provide insights to educators, school district administrators, university personnel and parents regarding African American mother's perceptions and beliefs about their children's White teachers. In addition, it will provide insights in attempting to close the achievement gap and improve the academic culture for African American students. It adds the voices of African American mothers to the literature. Furthermore, this research provides school district administration and leaders with research on teacher efficacy with a focus on African American male students in urban secondary schools. In understanding these narratives, improvements can be made in the way African American males students are perceived and taught.

Research Questions

1. How do middle-income African American mothers describe interactions between their sons and their son's' White teachers in a predominantly White urban secondary classroom?
2. How do African American mothers describe the impact of their role as an advocate for their sons in white urban secondary classrooms?
3. How do African American mothers describe and exercise parental advocacy for their sons in predominantly white secondary urban classrooms?

Definition of Terms

African American – United States citizens who are classified as “Black” by the Bureau of the Census. African American individuals are Black Americans classified as African descent.

High School Students – Students in grades ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth.

Middle income – The socio economic status between the working class and the upper class, usually including professionals, highly skilled laborers, and lower and middle management (Nelson, 2006). A family income of at least \$54, 430 which is the median income of a sample population.

Overrepresentation – An excessive or disproportionately large numbers or amounts.

Perceptions – The act or faculty of perceiving, or understanding.

Phenomenology - Is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.

Secondary – A secondary school is referred to as a high school. It is a school which provides secondary education for the last four years of formal education. The secondary school typically serves grades 9 through 12 depending on location. Secondary school is after primary school and before higher education.

Tracking - Is a method used by some secondary schools to group students according to their perceived ability, IQ or academic level.

Type A or Type B Tertiary Degree - Referred to as post-secondary education, refers to academic pursuit undertaken after high school. Undergraduate programs include any postsecondary education that takes up to four years to complete, including certificates, diplomas, and associate's and bachelor's degrees.

Under Representation - A state of being lower in quantity or quality than is actually the case.

Urban – Characteristic of or accustomed to cities or living in a city.

Urban schools – A local campus site within an independent school district where the student population is over 100,000 students located within the populated area.

Voices – The right or opportunity to state one's feelings or opinion in spoken or written words.

Summary

Decades after the historic Supreme Court decision desegregating schools in the United States, there remain pressing concerns for the academic achievement of African American students. The concerns are even more pressing when one exclusively considers the academic achievement of African American males. Standardized test scores remain

low when compared to their peers. The number of students enrolled in low level track and special education classes are highly disproportionate to their enrollment numbers in many schools. Adding to the crisis is the dropout rates, low enrollment in postsecondary schools, high unemployment and incarceration are additional concerns for the quality of education received by these students. This is and should remain a societal concern for a nation which should be helping to uplift all its citizens by insuring a fair, just, and quality education.

This study is primarily focused on how married middle-income African American mothers make meaning of their sons' education in an urban school district taught predominantly by White teachers. It seeks to explore their concerns regarding not only the academic achievement of their sons but also how their sons are perceived and treated by the teachers. Using the lenses of Critical Race Theory, Storytelling, and Black Feminist Thought, the study reports on how the mothers of African American male students advocate on their behalf and the role they take as advocates making sure their sons receive a quality and just education. If teachers are cognizant of the stories of these mothers, specifically the experiences of their sons in school, then they too can become advocates for these students. The teacher can help improve the culture of learning for African American males.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Background

In history of African American education in the United States, separate and segregated schools were the norm prior to milestone case of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* in 1954. This long-established norm was created in 1896 from the landmark case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. The verdict on the court's ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* legalized the principle of "separate but equal" facilities for Blacks and Whites were constitutional (Williams, 2009). The court's ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* validated institutionalized racial inequality and social norms of segregation for over half a century. This 1896 policy condoned racially separated restrooms, railroad cars and other forms of transportation, theatres, schools and school systems (Lardner, 1999). The ruling was destined to create "separate but equal" accommodations however, throughout history this rarely reflected reality.

It was not until the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling that the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision was reversed. In the *Brown* case, the courts declared that state sanctioned segregation was a violation of Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, which prohibits states from enforcing or passing laws that deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection under the law. In the United States, especially across the South, legal justification for segregation was reversed. Furthermore, *Brown vs. Board of Education* served as a catalyst for regulations for social and educational reform

within the United States. This law incorporated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1965 (ESEA) which was an attempt to achieve quality education for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status. Schools were granted federal funds to from the ESEA based on their students' socioeconomic status. Despite the ESEA's focus on reaching every student, African American students continued to lag behind their White counterparts; African American males lag behind all other groups in achievement (Irving & Hudley, 2008; Thomson & Zand, 2007).

Under the separate but equal policy, African American parents and children excelled on their own terms in spite of the obvious inequalities (Williams, 2009). According to Chapman (2005), "there were quality segregated schools that often academically outperformed their all White counterparts" (p.32). In addition, the success of African American schools had full support of parents who valued education and respected the teachers that taught, care for and had concern for their children (Williams, 2009). Tatum (2004) found the ESEA as means of providing students of color educational opportunities as White students and access to the same financial and physical resources of White schools.

As a result of the Civil Rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s, the demand of change in society towards the injustices and inequalities of African Americans included attempts to achieve equality of educational opportunities for African American children (Myers 1997; Williams 2009). During the 1950s, African American children were forced to integrate in schools. Many middle-income African Americans had the means to relocate from an African American community to some predominantly White communities.

Desegregated Schools

Desegregated schools was the law in the United States. Brown II in 1955 ordered that states had to enforce the 1954 ruling “with all deliberate speed,” which essentially means “move fast slowly.” However, it was not received in the hearts of all individuals (Carter, 2003). Teacher and student in predominately white school systems did not embrace the African American students and their culture. Instead, white schools focused on assimilating African Americans, expecting them to adopt white culture and behave as White children did (Anderson, 2007). Essentially, students were expected to act and behave White in the classrooms (Williams, 2009). Therefore, African American males in the United States historically were affected with intended discrimination that created barriers in obtaining education, housing, employment and wealth, within the larger society (Banks, 2015).

News media, reality shows on television, movies, ads, music and sports tend to portray African American males negatively (Howard, 2013). These negative images play an important role in school officials’ justification for mistreating African American young men and reinforce various undesirable stereotypes. This negative representation has created a permanent impact on their social interactions and how they are perceived in society (Weis, 2013). This negative portrayal of African American males has led one to consider the relationships with their White urban schoolteachers’ and how they are perceived by them. African American male students face difficult challenges as they attend urban high schools. Their social and cultural identity as African American males can often be devalued at all levels of schooling. Scholars over the past 60 years have

debated whether low academic performance of African American males is driven by socioeconomic status, societal and institutionalized racism, tracking, poor parent involvement, lack of understanding in teachers, low expectations, inadequate or inappropriate public education policies and school settings.

Tatum (2005) states, the history of African American males in the United States and their current state are often overlooked when educators plan literacy reforms. The lack of attention to the history of African American males and responding to their needs causes educators to blame African American males for the institution's failure, which has caused African American males to react to turmoil in their own way (p.28). While scholars like Ladson-Billings (2009) and Weis (2013) have demonstrated that there are myriad causes related to the low performance of African American males in school, others have also shed light on how African American mothers interact/engage their sons' educational performance.

In America's public schools, there are a vast amount of White teachers educating African American students; there is a critical examination in knowing how these teachers evaluate the cognitive ability of their African American male students (Sleeter, 2008). Milner (2012) argued that White teachers' perception of their African American male students are influenced by their external or social factors which is how they may construct and evaluate the achievements of their students.

Predominantly White urban public high schools have implemented the zero-tolerance policies. These policies have impacted the educational experience and outcomes of African American males' in urban schools. School teachers and administrative staff

use the punitive procedures of zero-tolerance for the suspension and expulsion of urban students, especially African American males which led to their school failure (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Furthermore, the zero-tolerance policies create an untrusted student-teacher relationship and unwelcoming school environment.

Contrasting Urban Low-income and Middle-income African American Experiences

It is critical to understand the ways in which African American parents are involved in their sons' education. It is vital to stress that African American mothers in low and middle-income environments are generally concerned about their sons' education. They have high expectations for their sons and want them to perform well in school and go to college. According to Sirin and Sirin (2004), a vast majority of African Americans live in communities that are not classified as low-income in terms of their socioeconomic status; however, those communities are mostly populated with African Americans and other people of color. Nonetheless, the majority of the research continues to focus on low socioeconomic students in urban education while portraying the typical African American male as academically place at-risk and generalizing their experiences to the whole ethnic group (Toldson, 2013). United States educational system is rampant with equality gaps, not just achievement gaps between White students and students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2012). School systems in the United States are still separate and unequal despite the Supreme Court ruling decades ago. Schools are becoming more becoming more segregated since the 1960's. Milner (2012) confirms that African American male students are more likely to be held back at least once during their school trajectory, despite increasing research showing that holding back children of color do not benefit them

socially or academically. However, it can make them more susceptible of dropping out of school. Retention rates for African American students ranked 34 percent among ninth grade nationwide, with 12 percent African American males and 4 percent of White students (NCES, 2012).

African American male students are three times more likely to be retained as their White counterparts. This leads to a high probability of some African American male students dropping out of school before earning their high school diploma. More than 2 million African American male students attend schools where 90 percent of the student body is made up of students of color. Most of these studies draw conclusions about the trajectory of African American males in general, with limited consideration of for middle-income African American males.

According to Reardon (2013) over the past five decades, there has been an increase in the income gap amongst middle and low-income families. Scholars argue that the socioeconomic status of families is a strong indicator of the child's academic achievement and educational attainment (Reardon, 2013; Williams, 2009). Traditionally the academic success of middle-income students outperforms higher than low-income students in areas such as standardized test, grades, high school graduation and college enrollment and completion (Reardon, 2013). Commonly in the literature, scholars suggests that there is a lack of African American parent involvement in schools viewed by educators, particularly in urban settings that blames the parents and students for their school failures (Bhana & Bachoo, 2011; Hayes, 2011; Morales, 2010); however, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013) 85% of African American parents attended a

parent-teacher-association (PTA) meeting and seventy-six percent attended parent-teacher conferences (Fenwick, 2015).

Researchers suggest that regardless of the parent socioeconomic status or family dynamics, parental involvement is critical in the academic trajectory because parents' can provide a wealth of information about their children's strengths and skills (Chapman 2013). However, when exploring the literature on African American mothers and son relationships, scholars suggest that these mothers in both low and middle- income levels play a significant role in advocating and caring for their sons.

Mothers of African American Sons

Low-income Single Mothers

There is a significant volume of literature that focuses on low-income African American single mothers' who are raising African American males. According to the U.S. Census Bureau ACS, there are 46% of African American single mothers with children living in poverty (2014). Many low-income African American mothers do hold an interest in the education for their children. They have expectations for a quality education for their children.

Often the socioeconomic status for many African American mothers normally indicates they have less time to participate physically in their children's education due to work demands and often times transportation difficulties. Nevertheless, African American families have culturally and historically been a part of this economic gap in our society that reflects on their parenting practices, working life while balancing other challenges that may occur in life. These resilient African American mothers teach their children a

variety of coping strategies and skills on how to manage these obstacles that are often unused and unrecognized in the educational setting (Brooks, West-Olatunji & Baker, 2005).

According to Ladson-Billings (2009), the cultural experiences and values between African American families and White families often conflict with each other. African American culture values interpersonal relationships, these sociocentric beliefs have a tendency to contrast with a Western worldview, which permeates in our U.S. school system. This difference culture experiences between low-income African American mothers and the schools is a risk factor in the lack of effective communicating. It is sometimes difficult for some low-income African American mothers to express their concerns about their children's education due to feelings of incompetence and low literacy rates (Crozier, 1999). In addition, some mothers feel they do not have the financial capital, education, and social means to assist in their son's' education (Wallace, 2013). This in turn can be challenging for mothers to expose their son's to focal educational experiences. However, when parental involvement is not consistent, it would not be sensible to suggest that African American mothers do not care or value education, which some teachers tend to conclude (Wallace, 2013).

According to some scholars, mothers' "nonvisual" lack of interest in their child's education has been classified as the primary concerns for some educators, especially in low-income urban schools. Some low-income African American mothers define parental school involvement as more than attending school functions. For example, some mothers often discuss school related topics with their children and help their children with their

homework, providing school supplies and other materials needed to make them successful in school. African American mothers often ensure that their children are mentally prepared for school by making sure that their child has the proper amount of sleep and supporting them in attending and arriving to school on time.

Some educators may perceive that the parenting styles of African American mothers does not match the parental practices of many White mothers. In addition, some teachers may have grown up with both parents living in the home with multiple support system. They must consider the circumstance which many single African American mothers find themselves. This includes lack of financial wellbeing and an absence of support systems.

Single low-income African American mothers have much to offer educators on helping their sons achieve academic success; however, some are not in a position to be involved because of their lack of understanding how to navigate their way through the school system (Williams, 2009). Some mothers who did not attain high levels of education may feel that the teacher has more experience and education than they do; therefore, their opportunities to get involved at school or help with their sons' homework is limited (Williams, 2009). Conversely, they share with their sons' the challenges, struggles and limitations to occupational attainment and economic security. Therefore, some of these mothers' stress the importance of graduating from high school and getting a college education so their lives will be better off (Harper, 2012).

Middle-income Married Mothers

For most middle-income married mothers, they have managed to advance their level of education, wealth that provide resources to move up the socio-economic corridors. These social gains are often attributed to their marital status. Having a spouse living in the home and the additional salary increases the income and opportunities to live in a more affluent community and send their sons' to better resourced schools. Most middle-income African American mothers have the same willingness to help their sons' educational needs as low-income mothers, however, they have learned what they need to learn so they can serve as advocates on their son's' behalf.

There has been a historical trend of social mistrust among African American mothers towards teachers and administration when it involves the educational concerns for their sons. Some African American mothers have perceived that far too many White teachers in urban schools are not supportive of their sons' educational needs. This is due to the long history of racial discrimination at the individual, organizational and institutional level towards African Americans and from past experiences. Race has shaped how African American mothers influence teachers practice when it comes to their sons' education matriculation. Studies have shown that when African American mothers in low or middle incomes interact directly or indirectly with their sons' teachers, administrators or other staff members, they can influence the learning outcome of their sons (Chapman, 2013).

There is a lack of studies that support the importance of middle-income African American mothers and White teacher relationship in urban secondary schools. However,

there are a plethora of studies that address the inequalities of African American mothers' lack of access to teachers. Institutional barriers and the notion that there is a "one size fits all approach" to parent participation (Crozier, 2001; Wallace, 2013) often marginalize African American parents. When this approach happens, African American mothers feel that their roles, voices, experiences and the experiences of their sons are not valued. It treats parents as a homogenous group, Crozier (2001) states:

Parental participation is not an invitation for a free for all; it is not open house on participation...Schools, it is argued, function on the basis of harmonization and unified vision and values. Parent participation thus poses a potential threat to this, in particular where the parent body holds diverse vision and values; the threat may be heightened when ethnic minority parents are involved given the expectation or perception that their value positions will be different from the dominant group (p.332).

White middle-income mothers and predominantly white teachers in urban schools can easily establish a more trusting relationship among themselves due to their same cultural, social and economic resources. These resources help build on opportunities for advancement and success for their children.

Middle-income African American mothers because of their cultural capital can influence the home base learning that can strategically align with their sons schooling. Many middle-income mothers encourage their sons to take high-status classes in secondary schools such as advanced placement and dual credit classes, orchestra, foreign language, golf, public speaking and debate (just to name a few) to develop their sons' talents and to receive a highly competitive education. Their sons are exposed to what is respectively valued in middle-income society. African American mothers have dealt with a long agonizing history of trying to gain an adequate education in schools for their

children (Anderson, 2007). They are preparing and equipping their sons to live in a racially gap, wealth and income gap, and employment opportunity gap society (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner & Williams, 2008; Tate, 2008). However, African American mothers in reality are trying to protect their sons' from the possible racial inequality and discrimination that exist for some African American males in our society.

The research concludes that in addition to providing a range of extracurricular experiences for their sons, middle-income African American mothers also educate their sons' on how to deal with racism by exposing them to the history and culture African American males, their struggles in society and to use them as a vehicle to succeed academically.

The Relationship Between African American Mothers and Their Sons

There is a significant amount of literature and conversation that addresses African American single mothers' relationship in raising their sons. Moreover, after examining the literature, it became more evident that there is little scholarly attention on the relationship between married middle-income married African American and their sons. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), over 50 percent of African American children are being raised in single-mother households. Scholars suggest that single parent homes are a burden across all races, not just in the African American community.

Noguera (2003) in households where the African American father were present, they taught their sons how to be a man and how to treat a woman. However, for African American sons whose father were absent, that responsibly falls on African American single-mothers to raise their sons to be men.

Many African American mothers raise their sons to be a gentleman, to use good manners and to be polite. Some literature suggests that African American males raised by single-mothers can cause harmful effects compared to African American females raised by single mothers. Collins (2002a) suggest that African American single mothers emasculate their sons. However, because of this emasculating, when African American males experience problems in their lives. Some single mothers are unable or unprepared to do what is necessary to help their sons' transition from a boy to a man. Unlike married middle-income mothers with a husband in the home, together they have the cultural capital and resources to involve their son into activities and act more effectively providing proper assistance for their sons (Vincent, 2001).

An African proverb popular within the African American community, says "Mothers love their sons and raise their daughters." This proverb alludes to the contrasting relations experienced by daughters and sons. The family customs of placing greater responsibilities to the daughters by the mothers is clear. It demonstrates the strong bond held between mothers and sons. Many middle-income mothers invest in their sons' education and take specific steps in preparation for their academic success (Williams, 2009).

Fenwick (2015), found that African American males outperform African American females on the SAT, ACT, GRE and on every standardize college and professional school entrance exams. Fenwick (2015), also found that African American male educators are more likely to hold a doctorate and have additional years of experience in the classroom as a teacher when they move into principalship and superintendent

positions. Many middle-income African American mothers place a high value on education and often view it as means of combatting against discrimination and a gateway to gain privileged access (Williams, 2009; Anderson 2007; Vincent 2001).

Some African American mothers are overprotective of their sons (Randolph, 1995) and appear to be more intrusive. Randolph suggests that this overprotection could stem from the post-slavery era. By overprotecting, many African American mothers were trying to make their sons be less aggressive and less subject to racial assaults (1995).

Today, many African American mothers are afraid of losing their sons to a life of crime, drugs, imprisonment and shameful deaths. In general, African American mothers have a loving and supporting relationship with their sons and take on the responsibility for preparing their sons to be successful. Without the proper love, guidance, training, boundaries, and support, many of our African American males would be headed for a life of crime or imprisonment instead of being the leaders and prize winners of this society that they are.

Cultural Capital of Middle-income African American Students

Since the Civil Rights movement, there has been a tremendous growth of middle-income African American families. With the historical and systematic disenfranchisement of African American in the U.S., it led to a vast amount of African Americans living in poverty, whereas the more affluent communities were occupied with Whites (Anderson, 2007). By the mid-1990's middle-income African American communities were well established and growing. Many African American during that time had moved into white collar jobs. They also moved from predominantly African American low-income

communities to integrate into historically White middle-income communities or in some areas, they developed an all-African American middle-income community.

Cultural capital involves the social assets of an individual that elevates their social mobility. These assets include the attainment of education, their intellect, skills, and economic status. The cultural capital allows for African American parents the advantage to move into a more affluent community and gain access to send their children to the best-resourced schools. Cultural capital can be used as a vehicle for the privileged and underprivileged to advance from one academic level to the next (Williams, 2009).

These high performing schools are key factors for preparing African American students for high graduation rate and high scores on SAT/ACT and Advanced Placement tests. According to Howard (2013), cultural capital is what many African American students bring into urban classrooms. In addition, they are exposed to a wide range of resources and opportunities that benefit middle-income families within and outside of their school setting. However, it is oftentimes significantly different from mainstream standards and worldviews. Although entering into the spaces of predominately White, many middle-income African American children are faced with the consequences of being one of few African Americans in their classrooms and communities. Having a rich cultural capital contributes to African American students' educational outcomes. It allows the opportunity for African American student to bring their knowledge, abilities, intellects and societal experiences into the classroom. By bringing their cultural capital into the classroom, it enhances their educational experience.

Middle-income African American parents regularly participated in school activities and maintain high expectations for their sons' while encouraging them to do well in school. Middle-income African American students, especially males have shown an increase in academic progress when at least one their parents were involved with the teacher and the school (Toldson, 2013). Because of their educational attainment, many middle-income parents feel comfortable speaking with their sons' teachers and often encourage their sons' to communicate with their teachers about school related difficulties or issues. Middle-income African American students are knowledgeable about Black history and their culture. They are proud of who they are and have a confidence in their abilities to perform just as well as the dominant group.

Urban Schools

In the United States, urban schools have been characterized as educating a large population of students from non-English backgrounds, high concentration of students from low-income homes, massive enrollments of students in both primary and secondary levels, and a great number of student of color according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2012). Urban schools face many challenges with funding, low achievement, resources, curriculum materials, regulations and policies. Two factors are seen as vital instruments in effectively educating African American students. Those factors are teachers' experience and culturally competent educators. Presently in the United States schools, particularly urban schools, are having a difficult time retaining teachers. Many teachers are leaving the profession within five years thus creating a revolving door of less experienced teachers teaching students who need experienced

teachers. That is teachers who understand not only how to teach and reach urban students but have the desire and belief that they can effectively teach these students who are essentially neglected and more susceptible to failure.

Furthermore, there is a high percentage of students in special education and the school's achievement rates are low (Ford, 2012; Oates 1995). Additionally, most urban schools are often staffed with a teacher that lack preparation and are inadequately prepared to teach students of color, especially African American males (Ford 2014, Ladson-Billings, 2013; Weiner, 2006). However, within large urban school systems, the demographic and the performance of the urban schools varies as well as the communities they serve (Weiner, 2006). Some educators will associate low-income students as uneducated to enforce school policies and methods. This causes teachers to have lower expectations for African American males believing they cannot meet the same high standards as middle-income or White students (Ford, 2014). Generally, schools that are located in middle-income, affluent communities have less of the characteristics and issues that are associated with urban schools.

Teaching in urban schools is a very challenging and difficult job. It requires teachers who are fully devoted to their work, especially when it comes to teaching and interacting with students of color. The case for interaction becomes even more vital when it involves teaching African American males who are often neglected in the education process. The failure rates for African American males are at astronomically low levels. The educational outcomes for these students are lagging behind the counterparts from other cultures. At the present time, African American males are disproportionately

represented in remedial, low track, and special education classes. Their dropout rates are alarmingly high and post-secondary enrollment is at diminished levels. Clearly teaching African American male student requires teachers who not only believe in the capabilities of these students to learn but teachers who will devote all of their energies to combat the obstacles which keep African American students from achieving at high levels. This must be done while navigating through and combating the obstacles found within urban schools.

There are some urban school districts whose dropout rates are as high as fifty percent. The teacher turnover rate within these schools is also very high. While the majority of teachers leave the profession within five years, that exit rate for urban schools is even higher. This does not account for the high number of transfers among teachers in urban schools. Urban schools usually have the least experienced teachers and a significant number of their teachers lack proper training to teach in urban settings. Further many teachers may have entered the teaching profession through alternative programs which may not offer some of the training available through traditional programs. Overall urban schools are struggling to survive and meet the needs of their students many of whom are lagging behind academically.

Spilt and Hughes (2015) conducted a study of 657 students in at risk situations. Their study concluded that African American children are less likely to create meaningful relationships with their teachers. The result was more possible conflicts between the two and less productive academic outcomes. The groundwork for underachievement, for students found in danger of failing, is being developed at the onset of their educational experiences. This is based on the relationships developed by teachers responsible for the

academic development. These are teachers who serve the vital role of inspiring students with the promotion of academic success or hindering that success by way of obstructive relationships. Ford & Moore (2013) found one of the factors which contributed to the academic attainment of African American students is educators who “adopt a social justice or civil rights approach to their work, which means an equity-based and culturally responsive approach in philosophy and action”. This approach cannot be adopted by teachers who are in conflicting relationships with students. Thus, teachers who resort to unfair disciplinary actions against African American students or any other students for that matter cannot justifiably develop positive relationships with those students. This includes teachers who sensationalize behaviors by African American students as being disruptive and escalate minuscule incidents into events requiring office referrals and suspensions.

In urban schools, students state negative and conflicting relationships with teachers as barriers to positive educational experiences (Vega, et al 2015). Furthermore “a lack of support from school personnel” (Vega, 2015) can potentially have detrimental effects on the achievement of students of color. If teachers hold negative perceptions or diminished beliefs and do not reaffirm their African American students (Tatum & Muhammad 2012), then support for African American students will tend to lag. This exacerbates the achievement gap even further. Among the relationships that promote positive educational experiences are teachers that use multicultural curriculum and anti-racism education (Wiggans & Watson, 2016) interpersonal caring (Caruthers & Poos, 2015; Williams & Bryan, 2013). A need exists for teachers to acknowledge the discrimination students face

in their society. Such discrimination affects how they perceive their teacher, particularly their white teachers. If students have perceptions of their white teachers as being part of an institution of racism and discriminatory practice or simply as being unfair in the classroom, it then is incumbent upon those teachers to enact teaching practices and an element of caring centered environment that will negate those thoughts in the students.

Teachers were referred to as one of the vital social supports for student success in high school (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008; Williams & Bryan, 2013). While parents and peer support ranked in higher importance for the students, clearly teachers have a direct influence on learning and can contribute greatly to the negative or positive outcome for students. Attendance and participation contribute to success in school for many students. The teachers contribute to the school climate. Negative perceptions about their teachers and school in general results in chronic absences by students. This is particularly true for African American students. Negative climates contributed to increases absences, while positive climates contributed to more consistent attendance in school (Van Eck, Johnson, & Bettencourt, 2017). The impact that one teacher can have on a student's school/learning environment, academic success, resilience, and life cannot be underestimated. At the same token community and home support, particularly support from African American mothers who serve as advocates for their sons, is seen as a necessary and contributing factor for their success in school.

In far too many instances African American mothers find themselves at odds with their sons' teachers regarding behavior, academic, and disciplinary issues. Wallace (2013) pointed to conflicts between parents and teachers in urban settings, as being far ranging

and leading to severe consequences for African American male students. Wallace (2013) found that even in cases when African American parent involvement and support is present, negative perceptions about their interactions in school exist among teacher and staff. This is compounded in the present arena of high stakes testing where a higher emphasis is being placed on student test preparation and performance with less quality time on building relationships among teachers and students. Boykin (2014) felt that assessments should be coupled with a schooling purpose that emphasizes more human capacity building rather than sorting and selecting. This is in stark contrast to the present school environment of ranking, sorting, and placing students according to what is deemed as intelligence based on test results.

Secondary Schools

A secondary school is an intermediate school between junior high and college. Traditionally students enter into secondary school in the ninth grade through the twelfth. Most secondary schools offer honors classes also known as advanced placement courses or other forms of honors classes known as K-level. Some secondary schools offer dual-enrollment programs, to allow students to select classes offered at a community college or university and receive credits for both high school and college. It is commonly evident that when middle-income African American male students have social, cultural and economic capital, the academic doors should be wide-open for them. Additionally, commonly in urban schools the teaching staff lacks training and are ineffectual prepared to educate African American males. Some of the teachers refuse to acknowledge or can

identify the cultural capital that African American males bring into their classrooms (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings 2009; Howard 2015).

However, urban educators have witnessed the dilemma of academic achievement in urban schools throughout America. The dropout rates of fifty percent or higher in school districts within large metropolitan cities are a cause of concern for schools, parents, businesses, and the nation in general (Howard, 2013). National school districts especially urban districts, because of their large size, are dealing with challenges of violence, low literacy rates, and more recently budget constraints facing the majority of urban schools.

There has been and continues to exist a catastrophic failure in our educational system. That failure lies in the fact that so many of our children are not learning and seemingly lack a connection to what is being taught in the classroom. This is where the academic gap truly exists. Findings implicate that the way out of this turmoil is to understand there is a problem which needs fixing using a variety of unique as well as practical approaches. Teachers are on the front lines of education, thus, it begins with them through research, planning, and implementation of strategies. In the United States, many students of color, particularly African American males, are not performing at the same rate as their White counterparts (Ford & Moore, 2013). This academic achievement gap exists irrespective of socioeconomic status (SES), gender, or region. Some studies have found that middle-class African American male students in urban schools are lagging behind their White peers (Ford & Moore, 2013; Moore & Lewis, 2014). There are some alarming trends when examining the national and local reports of African American male students.

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), middle-class African American male students are not meeting the standard required measures as their counterparts. In 2012, only 50% of African American 10th graders met the state standardized test requirements compared to 58% Hispanic, 77% White and 87% Asian (TEA, 2012). This disproportionately large number of African American students are not being effectively taught what is required to achieve at acceptable levels on standardized tests. Teachers and parents should do what is necessary in order for African American students to perform on grade level or above. According to scholars, student underachievement is problematic for students of all racial, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries.

Scholars discuss this problem in middle-class African American males as well. These findings indicate that there is an achievement gap among middle-class African American male students. Middle-class African American males are performing at a higher rate than African American males in low-income backgrounds, however, both groups are not on the acceptable levels as their White counterparts. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2011), the graduation rate for African American males was 68% compared to 85% Whites males. Although the report shows an increasing graduation for African American males over the years, nevertheless, they are still behind by 17%. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2012), an excessively large number of African American students are placed in special education classes, not graduating from high school, or dropping out of school. Reports indicate that 16% of students placed in special education are African

American. This is an alarming number when one considers that 13 % of students in the state of Texas are African American (TEA, 2014).

This increased number of African American students in special education has been a troubling concern in education for decades. In urban districts where African American students are the overwhelming majority of students, the dropout rates, special education placement and failing to graduate from high school are double and triple in some instances. In 2012, the national dropout rate for African American was 8%, Latino 13%, and European 3% (NAEP, 2012); the state of Texas dropout rate for African American 11 %, Latino 9 %, and European 3 % (TEA, 2012); and local dropout rates, African American 8%, Latino 5 %, and European 2% (TEA, 2014). For some of the Latino immigrant students, a high dropout rate may contribute to a language difference (Nieto, 2010). However, the high dropout rates for African American students may be contributed to a number of reasons, including academic struggles, problems at home, boredom with classroom instruction, and the inability to connect what they are learning to their lives. An increase in standardized testing has added to the disillusionment with schooling by many students, primarily African American students who receiving inadequate instruction. The focus on standardized tests and student performances on those test has lead teachers to spend a vast majority of their time teaching to a test. This focus limits the African American students' critical thinking skills and other skills that will help them prepare for college readiness. It also causes a diminished interest in classroom instruction within schools facing many other challenges to academic success.

College readiness in English and Math for the graduating class of 2013 in a local school district stands at, 44% for African American, 52% for Latino, and 75% for White (TEA, 2014). African American students are 31% behind their White counterparts in being academically prepared for college readiness courses in English and Math. When taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT) African American students are not being effectively taught the skills needed in order to achieve at high levels. According to TEA (2014) 10% of African American, 23 % of Latino, and 46% of White students in a local school district scored at or above the required criterion on the SAT/ACT. These state standardized test measures student's competence to move to the next grade level, graduate from high school or enter upper-division college classes. Overwhelmingly, this academic gap gives a false impression that African American students cannot pass the appropriate tests and lack some of the skills to further their education.

According to scholars, there are many racial implications in the challenges and issues that African American males face in education. There are trends in the overrepresentation of special education (Ford, 2012; Kuykendall, 2012; Oates, 1995), underrepresentation of African American male students in gifted and talented programs (Ford, 2010, 2012), office referrals for misconduct, and suspension and expulsion rates (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Based on the literature, there are disproportion suspension and expulsion rates among African American males. Many studies have found that lack of cultural awareness among teachers is part of the blame for such high suspension rates. These teachers often misunderstand certain

behaviors, expressions, and movements of African American male students and interpret them as threatening behaviors (Anderson, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2010).

While there is no clear consensus on the cause of academic gap, several explanations exist. Many scholars suggest that policies and strategies must change to improve the learning of African American male students. The vision of teaching and learning is one of active purposeful engagement which inspires thought and action on the part of students. Nationwide the effect is similar to legislation from Race to the Top has resulted in increased use of standardized tests and further testing preparation towards the goal of doing well on one test. Acknowledgment must be made that African American male students learn from a distinctive cultural frame of reference. The acknowledgment must also be made that teachers can have limitations in their thinking that students need discipline based on perceived behavior. Many scholars believe that these students are often bored, unchallenged, and lacking familiarity as well as relevance to their instruction. African American males and other students of color are being taught too often through a primitive methodology.

Most urban secondary schools with high concentrations of African American students have limited instruction practices whereby some students have fewer opportunities to create new ideas and guide their own instruction. Such is another problem, called “opportunities to learn” or “lack of” opportunities to learn. While some educators believe there is no clear consensus on the cause of the achievement gap, several scholars argue that we should be looking in intensely at the causes that create the achievement gap; these explanations do exist in the “teacher quality gap, the challenging

curriculum gap, teacher training gap, school funding gap, school integration gap” and more (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner & Williams, 2008; Tate, 2008).

Alternative School Centers

Alternative learning center (ALC) is an alternative school setting for students who have been removed from their main school campus for a long term suspension. The alternative learning center enrolls students in the sixth grade through twelfth. Generally, students from a disadvantaged background are typically more likely to face out- of- school suspensions, increasing the massive achievement gap. The practice of removing students from traditional schooling and referring them ALC is moving students closer towards the juvenile and criminal justice systems, also known as “school-to-prison pipeline.” Studies have shown that students who are enrolled in ALC programs have a higher chance of dropping out of school, unemployment, and imprisonment (Alexander, 2010).

Gordon (2012) noted, “the social reform policies and practices aimed at addressing these males’ purportedly irreconcilable waywardness become more and more punitive” (p. 3). As opposed to directly addressing the proper needs with regards to proper education of African American students, researchers and educators alike point to home and environmental factors of failing and defiance. National comparisons are made between the students and their White counterparts. Scholars are beginning to focusing their research on the comparisons of teaching methods of educators who are effectively educating their low-income urban students (Harper, 2012).

The Plight of African American Males

The research surrounding middle-income African American males' achievement in a predominantly White educational setting is emerging. There is an abundance of studies on the achievement of African American males in urban schools and the risk factors connected with poverty. There is a need for further development in examining the plight of suburban African American males who do not have the same risk factors associated with poverty but are still academically lagging behind their White counterparts.

Historically, some researches have blamed the achievement gap among African American males on race and which they believed impacted intellect. Harper expresses that not all African American males are at risk of failing or not succeeding solely on their ethnicity (2012). Studies conducted by the National Urban League (2012) suggests that a vast majority of African Americans have not had the same access to education, housing and economic success in life as some White Americans. This has negatively impacted the African American community.

The literature surrounding the plight of African American males addresses the effects of low academic performance and graduation rates. African American males are constantly being reported as underachieving in predominantly White urban schools where they most often bring the same cultural, social and economic capital as their White counterparts. Unfortunately, their middle-income status does not shield African American males from school occurrences that have a negative impact on their educational experiences.

Researchers have examined several factors which contribute to the prolonged achievement gap in particularly inadequate school funding gap, socioeconomic status gap, culturally responsive curriculum and instruction gaps, insufficient teacher preparation programs gap and more gaps that continue to divide African American male students from their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner 2015; and Tatum, 2004).

The impact of these school failure for African American males will unfortunately, lead to an economic reduction and social inequalities later in life. According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2012), nearly half of African American males do not graduate from high school. The Schott Foundation for Public Education monitors the growth of African American males and found that they experience unemployment and underemployment, have more health issues but minimal access to health care, they pass way younger, and far often times are more likely to be sent to jail for an extend period of time compared to other ethnic groups (2012).

According to Oakes (2005), there are in and out of school issues that must be addressed in improving the academic success for students. Therefore, educators must turn their focus on the in-school policies and practices that prevent the academic success of students within the confinement of the school's (Ford, 2010; Howard, 2013). In the effort to create a successful plight for African American males, educators can focus on what they can control and should believe that all of their students are destined for success. Unfortunately, negative expectations made by some educators validate a self-fulfilling prophecy that aids to sustain the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Educators are essential to students' academic success. They are the controlling in-school factors behind

teacher-efficacy and teacher expectations. Scholars may argue that the achievement gap is the central focus on African American male students' academic success. However, teacher-efficacy is also a key factor in promoting learning and academic success of African American male students in urban schools.

Race and Segregation Within Schools

Even though it has been over 60 years since the Brown vs Board of Education (1954) U.S. Supreme Court decision, there has been a plethora of studies on African American males in urban education. However, scholars and urban educators continue to support efforts in educational excellence for African American male students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Tatum, 2005; Weiner, 2006). Over the past decades, the research has provided urban educators and policymakers with a surplus of rich statistics that links inadequate schooling, funding, opportunity, policy, assessment, human, social and economic capital as the primary sources in the lack of achievement for African American male students' in urban schools (Ford, 2010; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billing, 2009; Milner 2015; Tatum, 2005).

Although African American males have made significant gains in education over the decades, our public education system in the United States continue to be separate and unequal for many of our students of color, particularly African American males (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, Tatum, 2005). More than often, African American males are incorrectly identified for special education, placed in nonacademic vocational classes or classes that lack motivation and challenges students (Ford, 2012; Oates, 1985).

Although the minority of the African American males are taught by White women. According to (Gordon, 2012), White women continue to make up the majority of those who teach at 76 percent nationally. African American male students must experience teachers with a great affinity towards them and their culture. Due to misunderstanding of African American males in urban schools, they are often labeled as the disrupters of order inside and outside of the classroom (Gordon, 2012; Howard, 2013). It is vital in understanding that there is a lack of professional highly qualified teachers of color in high schools, especially African American males. African American male teachers represent no more than 2 percent of the nation's teachers (Toldson & Lewis 2012).

To provide quality education for all students, particularly African American males, the teaching profession must provide culturally diverse teachers. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging that African American male students learn from a distinctive cultural frame of reference. However, there is something wrong and tragic with teachers who constantly feel that African American males' need discipline to control and based on perceived behavior on the part of students who may simply feel bored, unchallenged, lack of familiarity in reference to their instruction. Teachers who hold negative perceptions about African American male students and their potential for success cannot possibly create positive and successful academic outcomes for such learners. Teachers are generally not reflecting upon their instructional practices as the likelihood of diminished African American male achievement.

Researchers suggest that White teachers in urban schools should reflect on their positive interactions with their Black, male students and their parents, and be able to

debunk the negative stereotypes that associate with Black males (Wasserberg, 2014; James, 2011). “Schools often operate as spaces where the realities of race and racism go undiscussed, even if understood by the students” (Stovall, p. 232).

Increased Tracking

According to Oakes (2005) “tracking is a process whereby students are divided up into categories so that they can be assigned in a group to various kinds of classes” (p. 3). The practice of ability group or tracking African American males usually starts in primary school when they are more often placed in special education. They are identified as lagging behind in primary school and the equity gaps continue through secondary school. By the time African American males reach secondary school, they are placed on a special education track that excludes them from the enrolling in the educational tracks aimed for gifted and talented, honors and advanced placement courses.

Regardless of socioeconomic status, the level of schooling in urban or suburban education, African American males are systematically excluded from gift and talented, advanced placement programs, honors classes (Crenshaw, 1995; Ford, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010). Scholars have found that African American males are often tracked into a lower level, less rigorous classes. They are discriminately tracked into lower ability classes whereas White students are enrolled in advanced courses. Unfortunately, the practice of tracking is a system that excludes African American male students from entering into certain classes. The practice of tracking continues segregation of students within the school system (Crenshaw, 1995; Ford, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2010). Although schools may be desegregated, there are classrooms within the secondary schools

that are still segregated. In the present state of segregation within schools, African American males' education is in jeopardy. The educational practices in our schools have the effect of benefiting White students and impeding the educational opportunities of students of color, especially African American males.

This systematic exclusion of African American males in advanced mathematics, science, technology and foreign language classes may hinder students from being accepted into college, earning scholarships and advanced placement courses. Research suggests that this exclusion may be intentional on behalf of some White teachers' beliefs and stereotypical views that African American males lack the intellect, enthusiasm, and care from their parents to be successful. Teachers may support their stereotypical prejudices by projecting low expectations for academic success towards African American males.

African American males performed greater when their teachers have high expectations for them. Additionally, African American male students are commonly held to a lower standard amongst their teachers causing low expectations which ultimately have a negative impact on their academic success. Because of low expectations, African American males are placed on a lower tracking system that categorizes them into a different curriculum. This curriculum is measured by prior performance of the student and is used to teach students in ways targeted to their capability and prior knowledge (Oakes, 2005). Unfortunately, the curricula is not rigorous or challenging.

Ford (2014) suggest that tracking is used to maintain social educational disparity within schools and students on lower tracks receive a substandard education. Consequently, low-income students and students of color are disproportionately placed in

lower tracks; however, middle-income and upper-income White students are enrolled in advanced placement classes and dual credit college courses. Therefore, tracking is a school practice that directly impacts which students who are referred and placed in special education or gifted and talented classes (Ford, 2015).

Howard (2013) suggests that teachers should take an analytical role in reviewing data about the equity of their school, especially when it comes to racial demographics of African American males in special education and gifted classes. When critically examining the racial awareness of students who are referred to special education classes and gifted, or recommended for AP/Honors classes, research has shown that preconceived notions from White teachers about African American males play a huge part of the recommendations (Ford, 2012; James, 2011). The underrepresentation of African American males in advanced course is significantly contributed to them being misidentified, labeled and referred to a lower educational track and special education.

The underrepresentation of African American male students in advanced classes is a nation, state, and district problem. African American males are more likely to be placed on lower academic tracks, this trend is evident in the scholarship. Many of the test that measures intelligence and placement in advanced classes are bias to one culture and do not measure the various intelligences that exist among students. Rather the test are unidimensional and lack relevance to the cultures of students of color. Axelson (1993) asserts that the purpose of IQ is to "measure the degree of middle-class cultural assimilation" (p. 213). The tendency continues for schools to use assessment and

standardized testing that reflects the exclusive rather than inclusive culture of school which may not accurately depict the abilities of African American children.

Learning Styles of African American Male Students

The 1954 Brown vs the Board of Education had extenuating outcomes for the education of African American students. Upon the immediate integration of schools, over 20,000 Black teachers and administrators were released from their positions. This creates a void in educators who were familiar with the learning styles and behaviors of African American students. Morris (2001)) noted the absence of “those Black professionals whose voices were most likely heard in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were ignored as policy makers debated the ways in which Brown would become implemented” (p. 579). It was these same educators who worried about the educations of African American students in schools who were not welcoming to their presence. In contrast, thousands upon thousands of African American students were now being taught by educators who lack any familiarity with the type of effective education which the students needed and educators who were not necessarily welcoming to having the students in their classrooms.

Educators and schools are not doing a good job in recognizing that African American males learn in a variety of ways. My times African American males want to drop out of school, or just give up because teachers’ have shattered their academic self-esteem. Unfortunately, some teachers expect all students to “get” the concepts they teach by teaching all students the same way. Some teacher just refuses to adjust their teaching styles to enhance the learning for African American males regardless of what the research says. Not only do African American students need to see what is going on but also need

to feel what is going on, not in a literal sense but a psychological one (Gerow, Bordens, & Blanch-Payne, 2011). The stance many schools take on differential instruction and teaching to varied learning styles is an argument well suited for the learning capacities and academic achievement of African American students. The learning outcomes are elevated whenever students are given instructional practices that match their learning styles (Burke & Dunn, 2002).

There is a stark and often a conflicting contrast between the communal environment found in African American communities/families and the individualistic/competitive environment of schools (Tyler, Wade Boykin, Walton, 2006). It has been founded and substantiated (Berry, 2003; Hale, 2016; Irvine, 2003; Tomes, 2008) that African American students learn from distinct learning styles. It has been further supported that schools are not only failing to recognize those learning styles of African American students but also failing to align teaching practices to accommodate those learning patterns. The instructional practices and teaching styles in the classroom are lacking in congruity to the learning styles of the students. Many teachers teach in the manner in which they were taught and according to their environment and vision of how they see themselves in the societal world. Irvine (2003) elaborated that teachers teach from the standpoint of their positionality or their frame of reference by which they view the world depending on how the world makes sense to them based on personal history. This same argument can be made for learning styles of students who learn based on factors of family, community, and their environment. This environmental component includes but is not limited to issue of discrimination, racism, injustices which the students have direct and

indirect knowledge. Weiner (2006) stated the importance of teachers being cognizant of their students' environment if they were to understand and correct the issues that were causing disruption to the learning process. Figure 1 below is a representation of the various types of learning styles and cognition reflective of African American students.

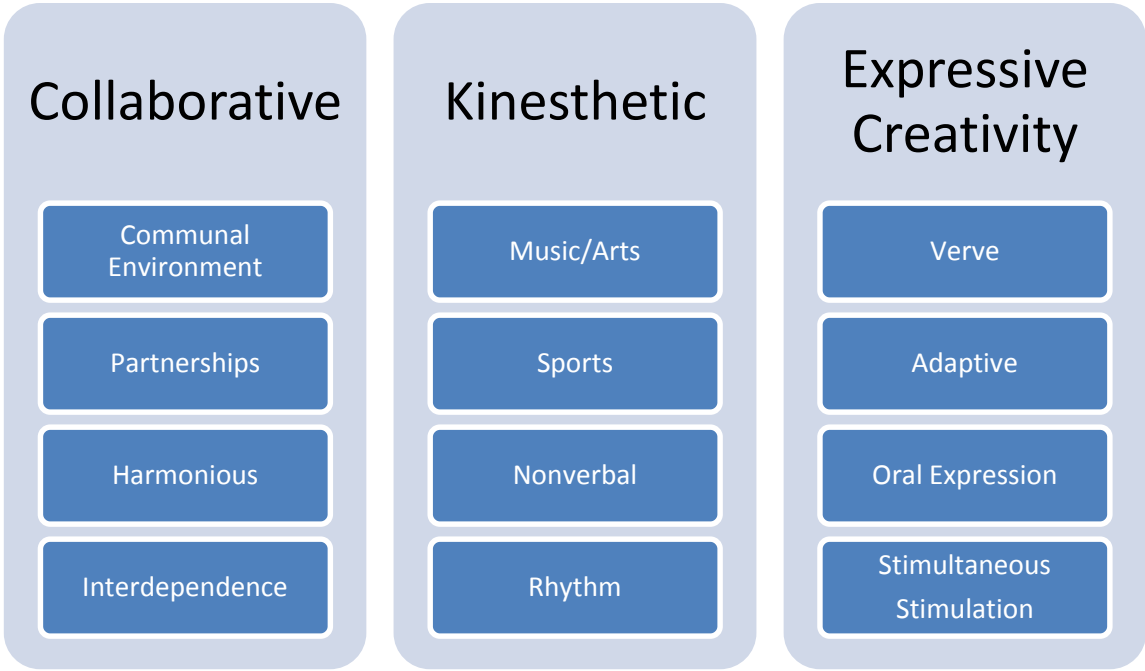


Figure 1. Ideal instructional practice and teaching styles which foster the academic success of African American students.

Monroe (2006) argues that a cultural synchronization contributes to strategic learning, classroom harmony, and meaningful instruction. It also avoids faulty teacher interpretation of what is perceived as student disruptions. This further fosters a more harmonious classroom environment that minimizes distractions, conflicts, and create more meaningful relationships. Carter & Larke (2003) justified the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in order to incorporated elements of the students' culture in their teaching. One

of the many of benefits of using culturally responsive pedagogy is the building of bridges between home and school experiences and the linking of societal realities with the academic curriculum (Carter & Larke, 2003, p, 62).

Cognizant upon the implementation of the strategies is first the teachers' acknowledging first the unique learning styles of African American students. Second is their realization that present instructional practices are not reaching all learners but rather curbing the academic achievement of a group of students with a vast potential for learning at a high level. Lastly the acceptance of culturally responsive pedagogy as an effective strategy for teaching African American learners and diminishing some of the disruptions to learning in the classroom.

Disruptions are commonly found not only in classroom lacking management but also classroom where teacher are failing to complement the varied learning styles with their teaching practices. For decades now it has been asserted that schools are extremely analytic or field-independent Cohen (1969) which the learning style of White students. Thus African American students who are field sensitive or reflective in their approach to information, are not being engaged fully in the learning within the classroom. The outcomes from ignoring learning styles in instructional practices eventually have repercussion for student learning, academic achievement, tracking, special education, and gifted talented placement for African American students. Figure 2 below demonstrates the polarity between the learning styles of African American students and the learning environment found within most schools where they are taught.

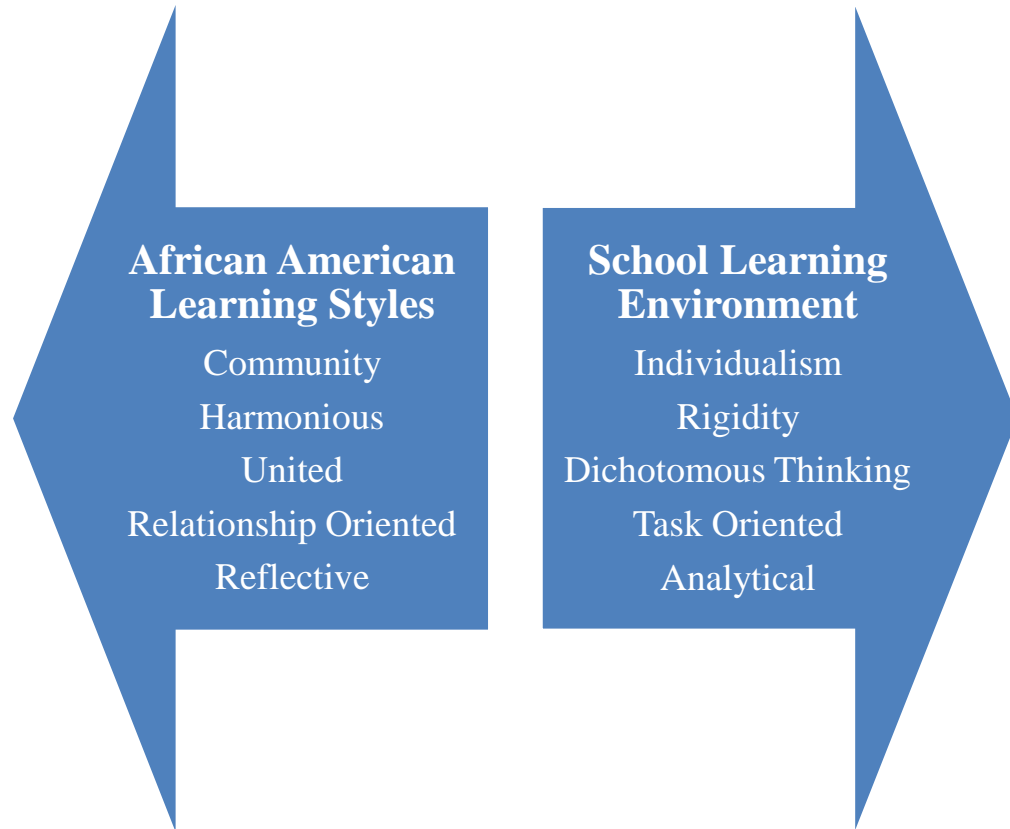


Figure 2. A comparison of African American Learning Styles with the learning practices within the school environment.

Overrepresentation of African American Males in Special Education

The overrepresentation of African American males in special education is significantly contributed to them being misidentified, labeled and referred to a lower educational track. Howard (2013) concerns is that some African American males are not being challenged in high school or taking challenging courses, therefore, they are often unprepared for the college level work.

African American male students are clearly marginalized across many areas of the educational system in this country. African American male students are disciplined far

more often than White students. Milner (2012) found office referrals for African American male students were infractions that were more subjective in interpretations as opposed for White students whose referrals were more objective in their interpretations. Thus, the referrals were based on behaviors and actions which the classroom teachers deemed inappropriate. Often times the teachers' reactions and attitude towards certain minute behaviors by African American male students lead to an escalation that results in office referrals. Milner (2013) further argues that the excessive office referrals of African American male students are based on the following six factors: "Teacher and administrative fear, institutional and individualized racism, under-preparations in teacher programs, instructional practices and cultural conflicts, ineffective leaderships, and inadequate counseling and psychological services" (p. 486). Time away from the classroom due to office referrals and suspension results in valuable loss of instructional time for these students who are already receiving inadequate instruction.

Milner (2014) found scripted and narrowed curriculum taught mostly by inexperienced teachers who lack in-depth knowledge of the learning objectives. Due to the deficient instructional practices and lack of Culturally Responsive Educational (CRE) in the classrooms, African American male students are receiving a lackluster education which denies them the access to quality education. To further heighten the problem is the increasing use and emphasis on standardized testing which negatively impacts the curriculum and instruction in the classroom. The George W. Bush educational policy, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), brought about the national trend of high stakes testing for grades three through eight. Such high stakes tests are engulfed with unfairness bias and

garnering increased use by schools throughout the country (Hursh, 2013). There has been an insurmountable emphasis placed on the standardized testing resulted in diminished reading instruction, disillusioned effective teachers, and gave students a false sense of priorities on their education.

Presently national trends in testing continue as legislation from President Barack Obama's Race to the Top (RTTT) has resulted in increased use of standardized tests and additional resources, classroom instruction time, and further testing preparation towards the goal of doing well on one or several standardized tests. NCLB and RTTT have also increased school privatization and school choice and competition. While "these educational reforms aim to transform education from a publicly to privately provided good" (Hursh, p.575, 2013), they have had detrimental effects on the education of students of color. The creation of numerous charter schools as alternatives to public schools along with the voucher programs to attend these schools has resulted in the closing of several urban schools. The advent of charter schools has not solved the problem of properly educating African American male students. "Increased state testing has resulted in charter school teachers devoting more time to test preparation and administration. This runs counter to what the original intent of charter schools has been" (Gawlik, p. 215, 2012). The effects on African American male students are compounded even further as they remain disenfranchised within the classroom and facing numerous inequalities.

Underrepresentation in Gifted and Talented Programs

One of the inequalities faced by African American male students is their underrepresentation in Gifted and Talented Programs (Ford, 2014, Winsler, Gupta Karkanis, Kim, Levitt, 2013). While African American students represent 19% of the national student population, they are only 10% of the students in gifted and talented programs (Ford, 2014). Winsler et al, (2013) longitudinal study of 6,926 Miami area, Low-income African American students found only 453 were labeled as gifted between the grades kindergarten and fifth yet 15% of that number were not enrolled in an appropriate program during the 2008 and 2009 school year (p,440). A study of two hundred midwestern teachers found that a student's race played a significant factor in teacher's recommendation for the gifted programs (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh., & Holloway, 2005). These findings do nothing to quell the inner struggles many gifted African American face embracing their multiple identities and dealing with peers who question their blackness (Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, & Brown, 2008). The existence of biases within the curriculum, ineffective classroom strategies (Tatum & Muhammad 2012), and negative teacher perceptions (Moore & Lewis, 2014) are prevalent throughout far too many classrooms in the country for African American male students. This is what hinders the abilities of African American male students being enrolled in quality courses which will enhance the futures.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) are subject areas in which African American male students lag behind their White and Asian counterparts. A congressional research report showed that students of color "take fewer high-level science

and mathematics courses in high school; earn fewer undergraduate and graduate degrees in science and engineering; and are less likely to be employed in science and engineering positions than White males” (CRS, 2007, p,15). Charleston, George, Jackson, Berhanu, & Amechi (2014), suggest exposing students early in their schooling to STEM.

In our vastly growing technological world, African Americans males remain under represented in the lucrative fields that are available. Exposing students early can serve as a possible a solution to decreased participation in STEM and as a promotion for career opportunities in those fields. It further serves to also curve the negative outcomes associated with diminished academic attainment by students of color. This challenge is one facing many African American families despite their income and socio-economic status.

Davis and Welcher (2013) found that the middle-income status for African Americans does not prevent their children from experiencing disadvantages as a result of their race. Residential segregation, few school resources, lower school quality, and greater financial burden in opting for private schools are among the detrimental factors which middle-income African Americans face (Davis & Welcher, 2013). Unfamiliarity, discomfort, and fear towards African American males causes numerous problems at school for these youths as they try to assimilate into a culture which often times can be unwelcoming and indifferent (Gordon, 2012). “White flight” continues to be an issue that also affects the middle-income. As more African American families move into suburban neighborhoods, White residents move further away (Gordon, 2012). Yet, within the schools that middle-income African American students attend there remains “daily and

sometimes subtle experiences of racism” which affects their academic progress and psychological wellbeing (Allen, 2013).

Eliminating and even addressing this subtle racism experienced by middle-income African American male students is difficult when its existence is denied by others, particularly by White teachers, administrators, and students. Watkins and Aber (2009) found different views among a sample of 842 Midwestern White and Blacks students on whether a need for change existed with regards to the racial climate of their school. A stark contrast existed between the white and black students on whether or not racism was an existing issue. The students’ environment and backgrounds played a role in their perceptions of the existence of racism.

These trends in the education of African Americans males cannot ignore the fact that 85% of the teaching force is comprised of White teachers many who lack not only an affinity with African American male students but an understanding of their learning and behavior styles. This makes them less likely to recognize and become familiar with the culturally responsive educational practices that allow African American male students to thrive in the classrooms. Cholewa, Goodman, West-Olatunji, & Amatea (2014) state that teachers who use these culturally responsive educational practices (CRE) help promotes positive behaviors in students “including zest, empowerment, connection, clarity, and self-worth, that improve psychological well-being” (p. 589). Such behaviors allow students to thrive in the classrooms and grow academically. They also help teachers and students avoid discipline issues which often times result in the office referrals mentioned earlier.

These issues can often be avoided by teachers if they select to use CRE that focus on positive instructional and procedural practices within the classroom.

While the academic achievement gap is narrowing slightly, it is still a widening gap which reflects a huge discrepancy in the education being offered to African American male students. The existing trends continue to present a dismal image of African American males which is still a prevalent topic for research; however, there is a gap in the literature which gives an unclear message as to why the gaps exist. While much of literature and studies have focused on this prevalent issue for some time, work remains on getting teachers and teacher training programs on board with the solutions.

Overrepresentation of African American Males Suspended and in Alternative Schools

In the literature, there are ample studies reporting the overrepresentation of referrals on African American males for unfairly punitive actions. Many African American students particularly males are facing harsh and unfair disciplinary actions from elementary (Rocques & Paternoster, 2011) to middle school (Shirley & Cornell, 2012) and high school (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2017).

Fenning and Rose (2007) reported in their study, teacher perceptions and fears of “losing control,” adds to the unjustified disproportionate referrals of African American males for disciplinary actions. Furthermore, African American male students are more likely to be “removed from classrooms for “minor and nonviolent offenses, such as talking in class or defiance” (p. 550) than any other gender, race or ethnicity. African American male students’ behavior and verbiage is often seen as unrepresentative of expected

classroom conduct leading to possible conflicts with the teacher and penalties for the student.

Zero tolerance policy was implemented in schools across the United States under the Reagan Administration's in the mid-1980s, it was created to eliminate illegal drugs and weapons on school premises (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997). This policy was put into effect on school campuses to communicate with students and their parents that the possession of drugs or weapons would not be tolerated without punishment. The results of the punishment for possessing any illegal drugs or weapons on school campuses would result in school suspension and or expelling students.

Some scholars argue the zero-tolerance policy has severe gone to the extreme. Students are being punitively punished (Noguera, 1995; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Regardless of the intent, ignorance, age of the student or circumstance, students are being treated like criminals (Noguera, 1995; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). School administration claims to have no discretionary authority to make exceptions. These harsh policies have students of color in urban schools often scarred for life. School administrators should be allowed to use their position and authority to govern over the zero tolerance policy. School administrators must take action in protecting our students of color from been victims of unjust punishments for minor mischief conduct. Without school administration interference, every little infraction violated by students will have severe retribution. Many time's innocent students or first-time offenders make senseless mistakes that cause them to face injustice consequences. Often when students of color violate the rules, they are immediately given a harsh expulsion (Wallace Jr, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

Zero Tolerance policies are prevalent in many school districts with high percentage of students of color. The African American male students are more likely to be severely disciplined and more frequently than the White students in the school (Wallace Jr. et al, 2008).

Because of the zero tolerance policy, urban students face suspensions and expulsions over infractions that can be addressed with in school disciplinary actions. Some of these minor misbehaviors are considered serious violations. Urban students are being harshly punished for being late to school, talking back to teachers or violating the school dress code policy (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Wallace Jr. et al, 2008). Research has shown that the zero tolerance policy has been directed towards more students of color than White students. However, in the history of America's mass killings in schools, more than often the crimes were not committed by students of color (Bennett & Harris, 1982; Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; Wallace Jr. et al, 2008).

The zero tolerance policy is pushing our urban students, especially African American students on a pathway to prison (Anderson, 2007; Alexander 2010). Unless these policies change, we will continue to see an increase in dropout rates, achievement gaps, and low academic achievement in our urban schools.

Underrepresentation of African American Males in Advanced Courses

There has not been a time since gifted and advanced courses begun in our public schools that African American students, especially males, have been the most underrepresented students in advance placement programs (Ford, 2011). Nationwide,

African American males account for hardly more than a quarter of students enrolled in gifted and talented programs or advanced classes. Nevertheless, African American males represent nearly half of the nation's students.

Having access to more rigorous classes and advance placement programs with benefit African American males and help prepare them for college.

Schools are systematically excluding African American males from enrolling in advanced courses. When urban schools, have a drastic achievement disparity among peers, African American males can become unmotivated and discourage regardless of their cultural capital.

Ethics of Care

Ethics of care developed from both Women's Studies and Feminist Theory. In the form of normative ethics, it attempts to show accountabilities in behaviors that are right and wrong actions. Ethics of Care determines what actions are right and wrong through the lens of human relationships. Many theorists (e.g. Kohleberg, 1970; Gilligan, 1982) derived this theory on the development that excludes (Kohleberg, 1970) and included (Gilligan, 1982) the moral thoughts of women.

Ethics of Care began moving beyond the moral conflicts of entailing issues regarding men and women responsibilities, and it was introduced into education studies by Noddings in 1984. In education, the Ethic of Care provides a caring relationship between the teacher and student. As teachers, to claim what it means to care, one must show it in their own behavior first (Noddings, 1998). When teachers care for the whole child, they show a sense of responsibility in stimulating natural caring for them and

responding to their individual needs. Ethics of Care is both relational and reciprocal. The connection between the teacher and student have an interdependent relationship build on human reliance on shared morals, values, and ethics.

Noddings points out that within the educational system there is a gap in the underdevelopment inside academia. This under development points out the issues of institutional prejudice and microaggression towards urban students'. These issues institutional prejudices and cast systems within the school that divide students based on their economic and cultural inequality.

Teacher Efficacy and Beliefs

Teacher beliefs can be defined as perceptions and judgments. It is something that is apparent before a teacher enters the classroom. Teacher beliefs can affect the way the instruction is presented and interpreted in the classroom. Beliefs are ways of defining behavior, making choices and organizing knowledge (Pajares, 1992). Teachers' attitudes towards teaching and learning are part of teacher beliefs about education (Pajares, 1992). Teacher beliefs are also connected to expectations and personal experiences. When teachers believe African American male students are troublemakers and underachievers, their focus is primarily on that and less on the student's' academic achievement.

The findings in literature show when teachers believe that African American males' students are not as knowledgeable or intellectual as their White and Asian peers, they respond differently towards them. They may not have high expectations for these African American students or believe they can learn on high levels (Gay, 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2014). When these negative generalizations are applied towards African American

male students, it hinders their learning. When teachers have low expectations, their students meet those expectations. When teachers have high expectations, their students meet those expectations. When teachers believe their African American male student cannot perform at high levels, they tend to lower the level of academic work. The expectations for these students are so low which in turn makes teachers set minimal instructional standards based on their beliefs. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), many students are very observant, “they note these patterns and they understand when they have been identified as not deserving a high-quality, humane education” (p.65). Nieto (2010) specifies that schools are a place “to provide all students with an equal and high-quality education,” which involves that we “begin with the belief that all students are capable and worthy of learning to high levels of achievement” (p. 30). When teachers believe in their abilities to effectively educate their African American males’ students, it reveals that they also believe in their students’ abilities to learn.

Highly qualified teachers have confidence in their ability to impact students learning. Bandura (1997) defines teacher efficacy as an expectation and conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce successful outcomes. Students often recognize when their teachers care about their learning and believe they are capable of performing. When teachers show they are genuinely concerned about their students. They are more likely eager to work hard which improves their academic performance (Gay, 2010).

Findings have shown that African American males’ students are capable of learning on high levels (Butler, Joubert & Lewis, 2010). We must create schools that

empower students to learn and develop a system that enables all teachers and schools to learn (Darling-Hammond, 2010). These schools also must create a meaningful scholarship with accountability systems that promise skillful teaching and well-planned resources for all learners (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

According to Gay (2010), many African American students believe their teacher does not particularly care about them nor do they get to know them. Some teachers have stereotypes and biases about their African American male students and their parents based on their socioeconomic status, academic achievement and family circumstances. Consistently, researchers also found that teachers tend to treat students differently according to their gender (Sadker et al., 2009). Teachers often do not recognize that they treat their students differently because of their gender. However, when they begin to critically observe their interactions, some realize they do interact differently with students according to their gender. Teacher-student-parent interactions are vital for the academic success of the African American male students. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), “when teachers have little opportunity to come to know their students well, and students have little opportunity to relate to any adult in the school on an extended, personal level, it should not be surprising that factory model high school creates virtual chasms to the cracks into which students can fall” (p.64).

Ladson-Billings (2009) found in her study that African American students of middle-income families outperform African American students from lower-income backgrounds. Nevertheless, the findings from TEA (2014) data reports show middle-income African American students are still lagging behind their White and Asian peers.

This achievement gap is still a persistent concern for educators, parents, and students. Some studies report the contributing factor for middle-income African American students' success involves their parents' involvement in their education (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The alarming failure rates, lack of achievement, and the achievement gap with respects to African American male students have caused many to promote separate schools for African American students. Hale (2001) affirmed such a step in order to do what so many public schools have consistently failed to do which is to teach African American males. Numerous African American parents have already enrolled their sons in charter schools. Some of these schools are seeing a huge influx in the enrollment of African American males and academic achievement. Parents are noting the emphasis paid in classrooms to high stakes testing and the overlooking of individualized student needs. Wyatt, (2009) noted how far academically African American students find themselves among other students. While the gap is diminishing slowly, a significant amount of work remains for teachers which cannot be ignored. If true progress is to be attained teachers will have to make genuine concerted efforts to implement many of the strategies for culturally responsive teaching.

The literature has limited information on teacher-student-parent relationships with middle-income African American males in high schools. The literature does suggest race and ethnicity certainly have a significant importance on how teachers perceive African American students and their families (Weiner, 2006). This incongruity may interfere with the learning and contribute to misconceptions about African Americans behavior, and

performance in school (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The research clearly points to African American students from middle-income and low-income backgrounds performing at low levels academically compared to their White and Asian counterparts. The gap in the research is not clear on struggles for building successful teacher-student-parent interactions for middle-income families. There is not enough research on high school resources parents can use to enhance their sons' overall academic achievement to the level of their White and Asian counterparts.

The academic achievement is low overall for African American male students (Moore & Lewis, 2012; Irvine, 2003, Tolson, 2012). According to Lewis & Moore (2014). "The opportunity consequences of failed educational practices policies and programs have, too often, resulted in disadvantageous life outcomes for African American males (p. xxii). However, the answer lies in the individuals who spend more countless hours believing, molding and teaching students who have a great capacity to learn. The restructuring of a school lies in dedicated classroom teachers. Administrators have the responsibility to search for and hire teachers who believe in the learning potential of their all students. The teacher with high efficacy serves as the model for change. Such teachers have a positive belief that failure can be turned around. Such beliefs help build a better relationship between teachers, students, and parents. Although the numbers may be small, the clear answer to implement turnaround is fortitude and desire by dedicated teachers. There are several examples of schools which have turned failure around to academic achievement. While they represent the exception, they are not a permanent exception. Change for the better can be accomplished with hard work and dedication. Researchers,

administrators, administrators, counselors, teachers, parents and even students make a difference.

Low Teacher Expectations

Teacher expectations of students' affect their performance in the classroom. Some teacher expectation about students are solely based on their color, race, social class, gender, dialect style, behavior, or the way they dress which are all culturally defined (Oates, 1998, Gay, 2010). Teachers transmit these low expectations they have about students into the classroom environment which often causes negative emotions toward the students. Teachers show differential treatment towards low and high achieving students. These differential behaviors often have a negative effect on the learning and consequently, widens the gap between low and high achieving students. Some examples of how teacher low expectations of students are generally communicated to the student are when the teacher embarrasses them in front of their peers, do not call on them to answer questions about the lesson or do not allow them to participate in a meaningful class discussion.

According to Gay (2010) many teachers do not try to develop a close relationship with students who they assume are low-achievers. When a student has a positive respectful relationship with their teacher, they tend to be more active in class and are willing to participant in the lesson. Pringle, Lyons, & Booker (2010) study found teacher expectations and the quality of instruction received by African American secondary students as vital factors to improve instruction. These themes were intertwined as secondary school teachers often provided their African American students with lower expectations and low quality of instruction based on unfavorable perceptions of the

students' abilities to perform academically at high levels in the classroom. The perceptions of the teachers were associated with students' educational expectations and value of education (Newton & Sandoval, 2015). This had ramifications for the students' sense of purpose for being in a school environment that lacked nurturing and care. It also affected the overall perceptions of education and future enrollment/success in postsecondary institutions (Newton and Sandoval, 2015).

Summary

The historic Supreme Court decision of 1954 desegregating schools in America had a significant impact on the education of African American students. They benefitted by being able to enroll in schools with their White peers. However, tens of thousands of African American educators who held an affinity for the students' culture, learning styles, and behavioral patterns, became unemployed. These educators possessed a familiarization with the students, had high teacher efficacy and were promoting in certain instances greater academic success than their White counterparts. Decades after this decision, academic outcomes for African American students remain at alarmingly low levels. This is occurring within an educational environment which has yet to fully recognized, embraced and adapted to the diversity of the students.

Presently an unjustifiable number of African American students find themselves performing poorly or failing in school. There is a disproportionate number of them in special education classes and low-level tracking classes, while a minimal percentage is being identified as gifted and talented. This has created a segregated environment within desegregated schools. The number of African American students exposed to STEM

instruction and activities is drastically low when compared to their peers. The perceptions of teachers for these students is often times negative or lacking in the viewpoint that they are skilled and capable learners. Some of the teachers holding these views tend to be the least experienced teachers who lack the necessary training, skills, and efficacy to effectively teach. Students also hold perceptions of their teachers as lacking concern or confidence in their abilities. When considering the case for African American male students, the figures are far more alarming. High suspension rates, frequent placement in ALC, absenteeism, harsher disciplinary actions, and high dropout rates are among the negative outcome facing numerous African American males. This occurs despite their income status and/or parental involvement.

African American students from middle-income families are experiencing some of the same outcomes in school as African American students from low-income families. The mothers of these students are also experiencing similar struggles as they attempt to navigate through the school's academic structures and disciplinary policies. The middle-income mothers and the low-income mothers do not benefit from easily established relationships with their children's teachers. There often is a lack of connection or miscommunication occurs between the parents and their child's teacher. This occurs within the context of parents having to advocate for their children. It also occurs within the context of teachers who lack cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity for African American student.

Teachers who lack cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity are blind to the plight of African American students. They cannot effectively teach them due to

misinterpreting both behavioral patterns and learning styles. Since the students are not achieving due to ineffective teaching practices, the teacher develops low expectations for the students. It becomes the teacher's belief that the deficit lies in the students as opposed to her instruction. This is common circumstance for teacher not having high teacher efficacy and failing to obtain academic success for her students. In the present school environment of high stakes standardized testing, there is a diminished focus of analyzing for and applying effective academic instruction for African American student.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research study focused on the voice of middle-income African mothers who have sons that attend or attended secondary urban classroom. The study investigated African American mothers describing White teacher's interactions with their sons in White teacher in a urban classroom. By selecting middle-income African American mothers for this study, the researcher intent was to effectively interpret the meanings of their stories and to contribute to the literature in this arena. Therefore, it is appropriate for me to use phenomenology qualitative as my research design.

Phenomenology

Creswell (2005) stated that phenomenology is when the researcher "identifies the 'essence' of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study" (pg. 15). The purpose of the phenomenology study is to understand the central phenomenon of mothers describing their son's lived experiences while attending a predominantly White urban secondary school. In this process, the researcher brackets, analyzes and compares her own experiences in order to identify the essence of the phenomenon being studied. The phenomenon, in this case, was the shared lived experiences and related factors that helped African American mothers advocate on behalf of their sons.

Research Design

Qualitative methods will be used for my study. According to Parkinson & Drislane (2011), this type of research uses observation, interviews or case studies, which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice.

Bogdan and Bidlen (2007) described five essential characteristics of qualitative research:

1. It is naturalistic, which means the researcher has a specific setting as a source of data about the phenomena being studied.
2. It is descriptive, using words, videotapes, personal documents and other records.
3. It is more concerned with process than with outcomes.
4. It means that data is analyzed inductively and built upon abstractions that have been collected and combined, rather than data that is gathered to prove or disprove a hypothesis.
5. Finally, Qualitative research focuses on trying to make sense of people's' lives and their view or perspectives on reality (p.164).

The research was therefore be qualitative in nature. Qualitative research in general, and phenomenology in particular, is concerned with describing and understanding human phenomena from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Crewsell, 2005). As the researcher listening to stories and perspectives of middle- income African American mothers meant facilitating an essential component of their culture and principle of CRT. Hence, storytelling was necessary to give voice to and hear the voices of the

participants. Storytelling is a qualitative approach to enhance the questions to the participants. It also allows understanding complexity, developing empathy, establishing common ground, and eliciting participation and collaboration with the participants.

Background of the District

In order to gain a better understanding of the how the middle-income parents are perceiving their sons' teachers and their educational experiences, it was important to describe the environment in which their learning was taking place.

The urban school district in which the study will be conducted is located in the southwest region of the United States. This school district is classified as a public suburban school district. It has a rich tradition of academic excellent. It consists of mostly middle-income to upper-middle income communities.

This school district has transition from a rural to suburban district over the decades. Bordering seven other school districts, it ranks among the top largest school districts in its state. It holds the record for being one of the largest district in terms of student enrollment nationwide. There are over 185 squares miles of acreage within the borders of the district. The student enrollment is over 115, 000 for the 2015-2016 school year. There are 89 campuses (54 elementary schools, 18 middle schools, 13 high schools and 4 alternative schools) within the district. This urban/suburban community has students that come from all socioeconomic backgrounds. The district serves over 850 subdivisions and apartment complexes within their borders. The student population of the district includes 16.51% African American, 8.59% Asian, 43.6% Hispanic, 2.3% Multiracial, 0.59% Native

American, 0.08% Pacific Islander and 28.32% White. There are 100 languages and dialects spoken within the student body.

However, over the last latter half of the 20th century, the district has seen an increase in class sizes, a more diverse student population, teacher and administration turnovers, increase in low-income students and cuts in the school budget. The district zoning covers a portion located in the city. Although the district does not consider itself to being an urban school district, a portion of their schools have a city address. This suburban school district is also beginning to develop some of the same issues that urban schools have dealing with for decades, yet it remains to call itself a suburban school district. For this study, I am considering the district as an urban school district based on higher class sizes, increase in student diversity, location (based on school zip codes) and the issues they are facing that are similar to an urban school district. The graduation completion rate for the graduating class of 2012 was 50%.

In the school year of 2013-2014, the professional staff consisted of 7,759 teachers, counselors, supervisory personnel, attendance officers and administrators. The average years of experiences for teachers was 11.6 years.

In January of 2012, the school district added its own police department. The police officers are responsible for the districts 107 campuses, including the protection of life and district buildings and assets. The police department has a 5,000 square-foot facility. The district police department has uniformed and armed officers patrolling the interior and exterior of all campuses. Officers are present at all primary and secondary athletic events.

The police officers have the authority to make arrest on and off the school premises. They are also authorized to issue traffic citations to student and non-students.

The school district received a multi-million-dollar bond for campus security upgrades in 2014. The bond was issued for \$55 million and included upgrades for nearly 4, 000 surveillance cameras to be installed on campuses. The district also plans to add video monitors, panic buttons, bullet-resistant glass and two-layered security doors at all visitor entrances for their campuses. Additional upgrades included purchasing new buses, tri-boxes, digital radio system with five new radio towers and replacing old radios. The school district has a television channel on the local cable provider or you could also stream the channel on the district's website.

Participants

The sample section of participants in this study represented a purposeful sample. Merriam (1998) states that purposeful sampling is more likely to be “informational-rich” with the respect of the participants’ firsthand knowledge of the phenomena being studied and whom I deem most informative. Patton (2002) writes:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (p. 169). In addition, without the interaction, purposeful sampling and emergent design are impossible to achieve (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Criteria

For this study, the researcher interviewed six married middle-income African American mothers who had sons that were presently or previously attending high school within the same large urban school district.

The purpose of selecting purposeful sampling was to select participants with the following criteria:

1. The mothers were African American;
2. They had at least one son presently or previously attending an urban high school; and
3. They lived in a middle-income community.

Each participant was assigned pseudonyms. In this study the middle-income African American mothers identified themselves as married parents, living with their spouse in a suburban community where their sons' are zoned to the neighborhood schools. Suburban is defined as a residential area within a large city that is mostly consist of families with two parents living in the home. These parents often are college-educated and are both working professionals that often work in town and city they live. These mothers live in middle-income areas with nearly 77% of the population has an income over \$50, 000 and 43% earning over \$100,000. According to the U.S. Census of 2010, middle-income was classified as household incomes ranging from \$34,496 - \$103,408 for Texas; and the racial makeup of this suburban area in Texas is 73% White, 22% Hispanic or Latino and 10% African American.

Procedures

This qualitative methodology explored the voices of six middle-income African American mothers' as they describe their sons' experiences with White teachers in predominantly White urban classrooms and describe the parental advocacy they exercise for their sons. Each African American mother participated in at least one 60-120 minutes' interview. Each interview were handwritten and audio recorded with the consent of participants. The researcher also used field notes describing the emotional context.

Positionality

A qualitative study relies heavily on the researcher, a human, as the primary instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described it this way:

Naturalistic inquiry is always carried out – logically enough – in a natural setting. Such a contextual inquiry demands a human instrument, one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as, if not more than, upon propositional knowledge and uses methods that are appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and the like. (p. 187)

The researcher was the primary instrument in this study. The researcher is a married, middle-income African American mother. She has two sons both of whom previously attended school in the urban school district at the center of this study. Having worked as a long term substitute teacher for the district for over seven years, the researcher had the opportunity to witness many of the challenges faced by African American students

and their parents. The researcher had been previously approached on several occasions by African American parents voicing their concerns about their sons' experiences and/or difficulties in the school district. The contexts of these conversations were the catalyst that had driven the research and reporting of this study.

As both a parent and educator within the district, the researcher was faced with the challenge of avoiding her own personal experiences which were mentioned in the first chapter of this study. During the interviews, the researcher found herself with the viewpoints of the parent. Efforts were made during the interviews to remain objective and avoid inputting her own experiences as a parent. The researcher reported these experiences in the concluding chapter as they related to experiences of the participants.

Each interview served as the primary source of data received directly from the participants' perceptions of White teachers' interactions with their sons in urban classrooms. The interview protocol was created from the review of the literature and some questions were developed from my own experiences and interests that offered information pertaining to the purpose of the study.

The researcher used an interview guide approach to naturalistic interviews. The interviews began with concerns that each participant wanted to address while emerging themes began to surface. To avoid the chances of receiving predetermined responses when collecting data, the researcher used open-ended interview questions. In this study the interview guide included three primary concerns: 1) personal; 2) the impact of their role as an advocate; and 3) how they exercise parental advocacy.

The questions were formulated prior to the interviews. This facilitated the interview to be conducted in a conversational style. The conversational style interviews allowed the interview to flow while permitting me to formulate new questions as needed. During the semi-structured interview process, the participants were asked to respond to questions from an interview protocol. The questions were designed in a way to help bring together some background information about the participants in the study and how they describe their role and experiences as an advocate for their sons.

Data Collection

The participants in the study were selected by purposeful sampling. According to Merriam (2002), “a purposeful sample is a sample from which the most can be learned” (p.12). The qualitative study consists of semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Pre-established questions were used and all interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Complementary data gathering techniques were used that utilizing a tape recorder, field notes, and nonverbal cues. The purpose of this techniques is to enhance the collection and interpretation of the data. In order to gather additional data, the research employed other strategies and techniques.

The researcher used tape recordings, field notes, and nonverbal cues that will be discussed in the next section. The data collection was completed with triangulation through face-to-face interviews. Triangulation is a strategy used in qualitative research that combines multiple sources such as interviews, observations, and documents. The interviews were pre-scheduled with each participant.

Tape Recordings

During the interviews, a cassette tape recorder was used to record the interviews with the participants. The researcher relied on the tape recordings to capture important information from the participant that would not be recorded by solely using note taking. To improve the accuracy and reliability of the study, a member check was completed with each participant upon the completion of her interview. Transcripts were made of each interview. Afterward, the researcher reviewed each transcript for analysis.

Field Notes

The researcher recorded field notes in order to compile a written documentation of observations, dialogue, experiences, and descriptions of the participants. Field notes were also used to compile a written documentation of the events that affected the participants directly or indirectly. The field notes served the purpose of recording participants' thoughts and feelings about the investigation. The researcher recorded in relevant feelings and reflections about the investigation. These written documentations were kept in a notebook. The notebook also contained the interview recordings and observations of each participant. The field notes were transcribed within 24 hours after each interview.

Non-verbal Cues

In this study, the researcher used the non-verbal techniques that would include: body movements (kinestics); spatial relationships (proxemics); use of time as in pacing; probing and pausing (chronemics); volume, voice quality, accent and inflectional patterns (paralinguistics); and touching (haptics) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher asked

additional questions during the interviews so that she could gain a clearer understanding of certain nonverbal cues. These non-verbal cues were recorded into the field notes.

Data Analysis

As a researcher, I am interested in a qualitative inquiry that is based on phenomenological epistemology in which social actions are constructed for meaning, and the evidence gathered is focused on the purposes and subjective meanings contained in the social actions (Gerring, 2007). The researcher primary objective was to analyze the meanings and actions. The researcher analyzed the data using constant comparison looking for emerging patterns of similarities and differences also known as analytical induction or the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009).

According to Merriam (2009) research will begin with a “particular incident from an interview, field notes and compared it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set” (p.159). With the purpose of analyzing the data for this study, Creswell’s (2003) six-step method for data was used. The six-steps involve: (1) organizing and preparing the data for analysis process, (2) reading through all transcribed interviews to infer meaning, (3) beginning a coding process by organizing the narratives by paragraphs into categories, (4) developing a detailed coding process of organizing themes for analysis, and (5) giving interpretation or meaning to the data. Thematic analysis is a method for encoding qualitative research. The thematic analysis of the transcripts revealed major patterns and themes. These themes were henceforth classified and coded (Denzin and Y. Lincoln, 2005). Based on the data collection, the transcriptions were themed and presented.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The process of building trustworthiness in a naturalistic inquiry is critical (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), the validity procedures can include; “triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, collaboration, the audit trail, and thick, rich description” (pg. 126-127). In an effort to enhance trustworthiness and credibility in this study, the researcher used an audit trail that reflected triangulation of the data through the use of interviews, observations, recorded field notes, and follow-up individual interviews.

Member Checking

Maxwell (2005) described the importance of member checking this way:

This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed (p. 111).

The purpose of member checking is to ensure information has been correctly interpreted from the interview (Schwandt, 2007). In this study, all interviews will be analyzed and findings will be summarized in order to present to participants during the member check interview.

Transferability

Transferability is commonly utilized in qualitative research for external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Schwandt (2007) states, transferability is the ability for

researchers to present “thick description” that help to illuminate the findings. Such descriptions can contribute sufficient amount of information to the trustworthiness of the data as it establishes a clearer understanding of the findings to the larger population.

Dependability and Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1995) refers to dependability as the naturalist’s substitute for reliability, which can be demonstrated by “taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change” (p. 229). To establish dependability, during the data collection, the research will be reviewed for accuracy and to approve findings. The findings will be beneficial to society about perceptions of White Teachers in Secondary Urban Schools. All research information upon request will be available to the participants.

Summary

This chapter provides descriptive methodological procedures used in this research study. As qualitative research methods were chosen and utilized in this study, the primary sources of the data were from interviews and secondary sources that included national and state reports. Those reports relate to how African American mothers describe and exercise parental advocacy for their sons in secondary urban classrooms.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents data from the voices of middle-income African American mothers as they describe their sons' experiences with White teachers in urban secondary classrooms. The questions were intended to understand the experiences of middle-income African American male students taught by White teachers in urban schools and how African American mothers advocated for their sons. Due to the importance in conveying their narratives, the researcher used the actual words of African American mothers to capture their ideas, experience, and interpretations through eleven semi-structured interview questions, subsequent follow-up questions, field notes, and observations. For organizational purposes and to make meaning of the data, the researcher chose to present the data in the following order: (a) profiles of participants, (b) emergent themes from the primary research questions, and (c) the analysis of the themes.

Through an in-depth analysis of the rich data four main themes emerged, all of which classified the mothers' as strong, intelligent and resilient. The researchers used pseudonyms for all the participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The following three questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do middle-income African American mothers describe interactions between their sons and their son's teachers in a urban secondary classroom?
2. How do African American mothers describe the impact of their role as an advocate for their sons in White urban secondary classrooms?

3. How do African American mothers describe and exercise parental advocacy for their sons in predominately White secondary urban classroom?

To maintain data confidentiality and protect individual identity, the researcher followed and abided by the IRB-approved researcher-participant agreement for the collection and protection of research data. This included securing all recordings, transcripts, and field notes so that only the researcher had knowledge and possession of the data.

The participants were interviewed individually and provide confidentiality. These individual interviews allowed the African American mothers to share their voices with emotion and passion. Three out of the six participants became visibly emotional during the interview session when discussing their sons' experiences in predominantly White urban secondary classrooms.

Profile of Participants

A profile of the six participants provided demographic information is in Table 1 and a plethora of knowledge from each participant's personal experiences that will be added to the research. A more detailed narrative on the six participants is included in subsequent paragraphs. Table 1 below offers a synopsis of the participants whose personal experiences were shared in this study.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Participants

Name	Marital Status	Education	Approximate Income level	Employment
Ann	Married 25 yrs	Some College	\$200 K	Stay at home Mother
Joyce	Married 34 yrs	Bachelor's degree	\$180 K	Registered Respiratory Therapist
Michelle	Married 24 yrs	Bachelor's	\$175 K	Senior Advisor
Patricia	Married 31 yrs	Bachelor's	\$150 K	Account Manager
Rosa	Married 13 yrs	Some College	\$80 K	Customer Service Rep
Zora	Married 2 yrs	Bachelor's degree	\$160 K	Registered Nurse

The aim of this study was to give voice to the six participants. These African American mothers shared detailed information about their son's experiences in secondary urban classrooms and how they advocate for their sons' fair treatment from teachers. Having detailed background information on the participants proved insightful when attempting to understand how they advocate for their sons. It was important to help the

reader become familiar with the participants in order to get a sense of their experiences and gain a better understanding of their testimonies and stories. Therefore, to help establish this connection, a rich description of the participants' educational, family history, and how had to advocate for their son's was provided.

Ann – The Dispirited

The first participant is Ann. She is native of Chicago. Ann is very considerate, naturally friendly and but often feels disappointed about past situations. Ann has two children, her son attended a secondary school in the district of the study but unfortunately did not graduate. Her daughter is currently a kindergartner. Ann is a stay at home mom who volunteers at her daughter's school, in the community, and in her church. She married her high school sweetheart 25 years ago. Ann has some college credits but wished she would have continued her education. She and her family have lived in the suburban area for 13 years.

Joyce – The Persistent

The second participant is Joyce. I refer to Joyce as Mrs. Freedom. During the interview with Joyce, she made it clear that she would “divorce a teacher” (request for her child to be removed from the classroom) immediately if she suspected any discrimination or mistreatment toward her son. Joyce is originally from Maryland. She describes herself as a “let’s just get to the point and move on kind of mother.” She looks at the larger picture of life and thinks of herself as someone who keeps her head above trivial situations. She and her husband have been married for 34 years and have three children, two daughters,

and a son. Her son graduated from one of the secondary schools in this study. Joyce and her husband are both registered nurses and has lived in the suburban area for 33 years.

Michelle – The Freedom Fighter

The third participant is Michelle. Her personality exudes power and influence. Michelle describes herself as a mother who will exercise every right to fight to the end for her sons. She is a senior advisor at her job and has been married for 23 years. Michelle holds a bachelor degree with interest in going to grad school in the near future. She has two sons, one recently graduated and the other son is a currently a sophomore in a secondary school in this study. She and her family have lived in school district represented in this study for 18 years.

Patricia – The Wise One

The fourth participant is Patricia, a native of Texas who has lived in the suburban area of this study for 31 years. Patricia had a talkative and friendly personality. In her interview, she admitted to lacking much knowledge about the school system with her first son as she did with her other two sons. Each son attended a predominantly White secondary school. After the experiences she had with her first son and his White teachers, she was better informed in her decisions regarding her other sons' academic achievement. She has three sons who all graduated from a school in the district of this study. She shared a little about each of her son's experience and offered suggestions on how secondary schools can improve instruction for African American male learners. Patricia has a bachelor's degree and currently works as an account manager. She and her husband have been married for 30 years.

Rosa – The Protector

The fifth participant is Rosa. She is from Louisiana and has been married for 13 years. They have one son who is currently a senior in a secondary school located in the school district of the study. They lived in a suburban area for 12 years but relocated to Houston in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. She considers herself to be very passionate about the education for her son and other male family members. Rosa is very protective of her son due to years of mistrust and mistreatment towards her son from his teachers. Rosa does not have a college degree but is encouraging her son to attend a university and become a first generation college student.

Zora – The Encourager

The sixth participant is Zora. She is a laid back mother with a lot of power behind her words. Zora provides support and encouragement to her son on a daily basis. She has a pleasant spirit. Zora is a practicing Christian and puts a lot of confidence in trusting God. Zora is a native of Texas. She has been married for two years and has lived in the suburban area for 8 years. She has one son who is currently in his junior year of secondary school in the school district in this study. She moved from an affluent African American urban community, to the suburbs where the majority of the residents are White. Zora is a registered nurse and works in the downtown area. She wants to pursue a master's degree after her son graduates from high school next year.

Each participant shared their narrative of their sons' experience in predominantly White urban secondary school. The six mothers shared that the support of their husbands was important as they advocated for their son. Having this background information on

each participant's history, family, career, and goal/motivation helped gain a better understanding of their social location. Each interview was filled with an array of emotions that included anger, disgust, fear, sadness, and joy. These mothers are resilient. All of the participants at some point in the interview chuckled out of disbelief about a situation, while the majority of them cried when describing a painful experience. The mothers shared similar thoughts in describing experiences with their son's teachers. For example, they all said remarks such as "it has been a struggle, this was a terrible experience for my son, and I feel like I've been on a battlefield for my son." These remarks were shared by mothers' in reference to their advocacy and experience with their sons' White teachers.

Rosa stated:

This is a good topic that you are researching. I am so happy that you are doing this for us (African American mothers and sons) it is needed... There are so many African American mothers that are going through the same experiences with their son's now ... I know this is going to benefit them one day... Thank you for doing this ... letting my story be heard.

Michelle stated:

If my son is experiencing this type of treatment from his teachers, I can imagine that all of the other African American males are. I'm not just an advocate for my son, but for all of the other African American males in the school. When I see something going on that seems wrong, I speak up and ask questions ... So this document is going to help educate some mothers! These White teachers need to know that they are not going to continue to damage our sons! I want to read your dissertation and share it with other moms. Thank you.

Ann added, "I wish something, like you're doing, was available to me when my son started high school, maybe I would have been better prepared for all of the barriers and obstacles that we faced." These mothers were pleased that their voices were contributing to the literature and they were inspired that it would be helpful to future

mothers. Even though African American mothers have intelligence and a voice, oppression in our society continues to silence their voices. In understanding how African American mothers' advocate for their sons' as a whole, their voices continue to remain unheard. The message guiding the data analysis was in hearing the voices of these middle-income African American mothers as they describe their sons' experiences with White teachers' in predominantly White urban secondary classrooms.

Presentation of the Themes

Mothers Describing Their Sons' Experiences with White Teachers

Each category of the sections that follow represent the voices of the participants regarding their sons' experiences with their White teachers in predominately White secondary urban classrooms. I coded the transcripts according to the four main themes (a) White teachers lack a positive relationship with African American male students (b) White teachers do not understand African American males culture (c) White teachers' do not treat African American males fairly (d) White teachers have low expectations for African American males. The experiences these middle-income African American mothers described in their interviews covered key issues about their sons' academic performance; discipline and alternative schooling, and how the lack of teacher diversity impact their sons learning. Additionally, these mothers shared their views on what should be changed in the school district to enhance the learning opportunities for African American males. The participants in this study all felt like their sons would receive a quality education because their school was located in affluent area where schools had necessary resources to be successful and the teachers had high expectations for all

students; however, the research revealed unfair treatment toward the mothers and their son's.

White Teachers Lack Positive Relationships with African American Male Students

African American mothers voiced a variety of negative feelings about their sons' relationships with their White teachers. Many of the participants expressed that the White teachers really did not build or develop a relationship with their sons, the teachers did not care about them and they were often disrespectful towards their sons' in the classrooms. Ann believes that teachers should try to build genuine relationships with their African American male students. She said, "It would nice to know that someone cares or showed that they cared about my son." She and other moms felt that if their sons' teachers had a relationship with their sons,' the majority of the issues or misunderstandings that arose in the classrooms would have been handled completely different by both parties. Parents expressed that teacher should be mindful of their own biases that enables them to understand more fully about African American males and who they are outside of their classrooms. By becoming a culturally competent teacher, it will help White teachers to effectively communicate with their students and eliminate some of the misunderstanding that happens in the classroom.

Ann went on to say, "if the teachers would have had a relationship with my son, they would have identified right away when something is off with him, instead of thinking he's a problem." The mothers felt like if their sons' are having problems with their White teachers in the classroom, it is most likely because of how the teacher treats them. The

lack of positive interaction in the classroom will influenced the way African American males perform.

Zora said, “If my son feels like his teacher doesn’t like him, it’s going to affect his overall performance in that class.” Patricia describes her son’s relationship with his White teachers:

I think that they just don't go out of their way to have a relationship with black students or at least my son's. They didn't go out of their way to have any kind of relationships with them (African American males). I don't think they tried to get to know them (African American males) better and understand who they were or who they are. If you don't know anything about a person and their culture, do you really know how to teach them if you can't understand them? I don't remember any relationship that he (my son) ever had with any of his teachers. I don't think they've ever approached him (my son's) to build a teacher/student relationship. It was more like I'm the teacher and you're the student.

Joyce added, “The relationship between my son and his teachers are basic, nothing special. There was no one that my son particularly liked or spoke highly of.” The mothers’ felt as if their sons’ had a positive supportive relationship with their White teachers, they would have attained higher levels of achievement and less conflicts with their teachers. Ann felt that it was a non-existent relationship with her son and his White teachers. The other mothers were in agreement with Ann, restating that there was no student-teacher relationship with their sons.’ Rosa stated:

One coach talked crazy to my son. They (the teachers) never really had a relationship with him but they (the teachers) use their power to threaten him as if to say, if you don’t do this I’m going to go to your coach, they would relay messages to the coach and the coach would automatically have him singled out because of what the other teachers would tell him. It got to the point where my son kept saying that he didn't want to go to school anymore.

Several experiences occurred even before their sons entered the classroom with their White teacher. During the student orientation, after examining the interaction between the White teacher and their sons, this first impression left the mothers feeling concerned that the teacher did not want their sons in their advanced level classrooms and the teacher felt uncomfortable having a cordial conversation with the sons in that brief interaction. The mothers felt like teachers were not sending a message to their sons that they expected them to succeed in their classroom, and that they were not ready and willing to teach them. During student orientation, Joyce explains,

When I went to the student orientation with my son, his teacher said right away that this was advanced honors algebra. I'm saying to myself, we know what class this is, he's enrolled in it. Or, maybe she was thinking we were lost. She then proceeded to say that the class was very fast pace, it was an accelerated class and if he didn't think he could keep up with the class, he could move "down" to the on level classes. Yes, she said that! I don't think she even asked him his name or what he even liked about algebra (long pause) she just assumed that he was not going to keep up with the work.

Joyce spoke clearly about this concern, her thoughts were, "after speaking to that one teacher, I knew right away she was going to be work for my son or me." Joyce son is her last child to graduate from secondary school. She expressed,

"Some of the same experiences that happen with my other two daughters in secondary school were beginning to happen to my son, but this time I was prepared to fight in the battle with those teachers instead of just letting what they say be the final decision. I voiced my concerns and opinions about certain matters."

Similarly, Patricia states:

"This was at the beginning of the school year, you know when you go to meet the teacher, of course, and he was the only black in the class. Before he even got in the class, the teacher told us that the class was a difficult class and it might not be on his level."

Patricia also referenced that the teacher did not offer any other solutions besides informing her that her son should be in regular classes because she thought the course work would be too difficult for him. Patricia stated that she informed the teacher that the counselor recommended the advanced placement classes for her son, but the teacher was unresponsive. She left the school feeling like the “teacher did not want my son in the class solely because he was African American.”

Rosa expressed that her son was being harassed by his White teachers. The teachers would threaten him by saying, “if you don't sit down or if you don't stop talking, I'm going to tell your coach.” They would report to the coach anything they perceived as negative behavior by him in their classroom. Rosa exclaimed that her son could not act like a typical teenager at school or just be himself because everything he did was scrutinized. When the coach received the messages from the other teachers about her son's behavior, the coach would embarrass him in front of his teammates and exclude him from playing in the basketballs games. Rosa felt like he was always being targeted by his White teachers. The teachers did not try to build a relationship with him, instead, they drove a wedge between themselves and her son. This experience with her son's White teachers had a negative impact on his education. Her son began to lose interested in attending school. Rosa was overwhelmed by all of the negative phone calls, meetings, and referrals from his teachers. She eventually made the decision to withdraw her son mid-year from public school in the middle of his junior year to emergency homeschooling. It was a hard decision to make for Rosa and her family. This was emotionally and socially

difficult for her son. He was used to being around his close friends and being actively involved in sports. This situation affected the entire family as a whole, in a negative way. The entire family was emotionally distraught by all the events that had occurred over the past year. The problems at school with her son and his teachers eventually caused intense family conflicts in the home. Eventually, the family relocated to another part of town and registered their son to attend a different secondary school within the same district. Rosa felt that the new school was a better environment for her son. The teachers welcomed her son into their classrooms and the communication was positively received by the student and parents. Her son was eventually playing on the football and basketball team with his new school and his grades improved. Conversely, Michelle shared how the White male teachers interacted with her son:

“Most of the time it’s kind of like my son doesn’t have a relationship with his teachers. Well, I should say most the time with his White female teachers. They do not have a relationship with my son. It’s kind of just like, that’s my teacher and that’s just it. However, with some of his male teachers, even though they are White, he will have a better relationship with them. Just because from a man perspective they know how to (just a little bit more) maybe talk to them and treat them regular, with respect, just like anybody would. I feel like the White male teachers did not do all of that nitpicking and criticizing that White female teacher do. Well, at least not on the same level as White female teachers does.”

On the contrary, Zora also added that she felt like her son’s White male teachers are always trying to put him in his place, she explains,

“It’s always a constant degrading towards my son (long pause) as if they (male teachers) feel like they’ve been in a man-to-man type of challenge with my son. They always make open comments, out right in class, or in front of other students to shame my son or they use derogatory comments towards him. The teacher used very condescending tones and things like that to try and make my son sit down.”

All of the mothers have shared an experience where their sons' are often put in classrooms where their needs are not being met when it comes to supporting, nurturing and fair discipline by both White male and female teachers. Instead, they are labeled, humiliated, ignored or mistreated in ways that generate and reinforce academic failure.

All of the African American mothers' responses implied that their sons' relationship with their White female teachers had a negative impact on their education. More importantly, all of the African American mothers indicated that they too felt frustrated when speaking with the teachers on behalf of their sons. Many of the interactions began with the initial meet the teacher events, or conference. Some mothers reported that their first interaction with their sons' teacher was a negative report regarding their sons' academics or behavior in the class. Joyce shares:

So I can remember distinctly her (the teacher) calling me one evening and saying that he (my son) was the worst child in her class, now if you can imagine a mother who has been to every PTA meeting, to every conference from kindergarten until now and I never hearing those words about him before. I'm thinking where this coming from is.

Joyce was perplexed about the teacher's comment about her son. Unfortunately, this was the first contact Joyce had with this particular teacher and it was not good news. The tone in which the teacher was speaking to Joyce only confirmed the complaints her son was reporting that he did not like this teacher because she embarrasses him in front of the class repeatedly.

Michelle shares a similar story. She states that after several complaints from her son about his teacher, she decides to contact the teacher:

I sent her an email saying how can we do this, we can have a conversation over the phone, email back and forth or I preferred to have a meeting face-to-face. Let's see how we can work together. The teacher would send me nasty emails - Yes! the teacher sent me nasty, ugly emails telling me basically that I didn't raise my son right. She really said inappropriate things in the email to me, it was very unprofessional. I said to her, if you're responding to me like this, I'm afraid of how you respond to the kids in the classroom, especially my son.

Occasionally, some African American mothers' in the study suspected that their son was behind some of the mischievous behaviors in the classroom. However, after several incidences surfaced and things were becoming unmanageable for their sons' to continue their education in the classroom with their teacher, the mother's knew their sons were no longer part of the problems, in actuality, they believed their sons' were being verbally humiliated, negatively stereotyped and mistreated in the classroom based on race. The mothers were confident that the mistreatment toward their sons was race related. This mistreatment from the teachers did not happen toward any of the White students in the classrooms, only toward students of color according to the sons.' Michele and Zora both shared that some of the White students in the same classroom with their sons would question the teacher demeanor towards students of color. Some of the White students would ask the teacher if they were reacting to certain way toward situations because the students were African American or from another ethnic group.

Ann shared an experience during her son's senior year in secondary school. She believes her son's experience has hindered his overall learning. She explained it by saying,

"My son would come home complaining about his crazy teacher and how she would do things on purpose to him. I started receiving phone calls just about every day

from his teacher saying he was tardy and disruptive in her class. My son would be in the class when the bell rung but not in his seat and she would mark him tardy. Eventually, the tardiest turned lead up to D-Hall's (in schools suspension), and the D-Hall's lead up to out-of-school suspension." Ann shared that every day when her son came home from school he was angry and upset about something that happened in the class with his White teacher. Ann said, "My son told me that his teacher picks on him about every little thing that he does." According to Ann, the teacher would regularly humiliate him in front of other students saying, "Where is your pencil? And why do you even come to school if you are not prepared to learn? While slamming things on her desk while she is talking to him." When Ann had requested a meeting with the teacher and principal, during the meeting teacher denied all allegations of saying or doing those things towards her son in the classroom.

Rosa felt like the teachers were not motivating her son to take advanced placement courses. The teachers expressed that the courses were not going to help because of the amount of work involved and because most colleges do not accept advanced placement credits. Rosa listened to the teacher make false conclusions about advanced courses being harmful to her son. She did not believe that the teacher had her sons' best interest in mind. Rosa believed that the advanced courses were a better option for her son courses in terms of a rigorous learning. However, she knew right away that the teacher was not a good fit for her son. Patricia also agreed with Rosa that advanced placement classes benefited her son's academic abilities. Unfortunately, if she would have followed the teacher recommendations, her son would not have enrolled in the class. Patricia was pleased that

the advanced placement courses prepared her son for college in spite of her son's teacher telling them that he should go into the general algebra course. Patricia expressed, "Patricia explains,

...." because if I had not fought for him, my son would not have been able to stay in AP classes and he wouldn't have been able to test out of the math portion of the college placement exam. I feel that if I would not have fought for my kids in a lot of the situations, they would have gotten overlooked and they would have been denied some of their basic rights in school.

According to the mothers, their sons' White teachers only communicated with them when there was a problem in the classroom. During email correspondence or phone calls, the mothers felt like the teachers did not value their input when offering ways in understanding their son. The teachers' left the mothers with the impression that they were not willing to use the recommendations offered when interacting with African American males. However, the teachers just wanted the mothers to be aware of the difficulties they were having in the classroom with their sons and was not susceptible in receiving input on how they could better understand their son's' or work together to alleviate classroom problems.

White Teachers Do Not Understand African American Male Culture

The mothers believe that the White teachers should be culturally competent when teaching African American students, especially males. All of the mothers' felt like most of the White teachers' have trouble relating to African American male students and their culture. Even though their teachers' may have been raised in a middle-income home like their students, the teachers' may not see them in the same socioeconomic status. Also, the mothers' believed that the teachers' cultural experiences did not mirror those of African

American males. The mothers' expressed that their sons' were not engaged in many meaningful lessons highlighting their culture. Patricia believes that her three sons' were having difficulties in the classroom because of their race. She explains about each of her experiences:

With two of my sons, I believe their teachers did not want to have my them in their classes solely because they were African American males. They both were in AP classes and she really did not want to teach to teach him. I think it goes back to slavery with Whites not wanting us (African Americans) to be educated, I truly believe it goes back to that.

The mothers were in accordance with each other believing that predominately White secondary urban schools lack culturally competent teachers in the classrooms. Gay (2010) and these mothers believe cultural competency teachers means more than just being aware of different cultures of students. It means knowing and understanding the norms and tendencies of those students, more specifically, African American male students. Gay (2010) suggest that White teachers fully comprehend how White dominance and privilege has impacted our schools and societal interactions. African American mothers' wish that teachers, counselors, and administrators would have a meaningful relationship with African American males and help in the fight for equality education. Ann simply put it, "teachers need to know all of their students." Rosa explained,

"These teachers don't have patience with African American teenagers. They don't have patience because they don't know how to deal with an African American male. Many times they (teachers) assume so much about you just by the way you look, especially with African American males. My son and his friends were singled out in class by their White teacher. She would say, "oh my gosh, I have to deal with all these basketball players

together in my classroom – they are so disruptive I can’t even teach.” The high school is filled with all kinds of athletes. Is she saying this about the tennis players too?”

One of the things that disturbed the mothers’ was the daily conflicts between their sons’ and their teachers’. In all of the narratives, there seems to be a disconnection between White teachers and their African American male students. This disconnection between the teacher and student will hinder the teacher's’ ability to effectively teach and the student’s ability to effectively learn. So many of our African American male students are not receiving the proper support from their teachers in middle-income secondary school settings. Joyce expressed,

I found it difficult particularly with my son because he was smart and he could have done a whole lot better, but he came along at a time where there was that stigma of being smart and being separated from the people (friends) he wanted to be around. Being the only black male or two in a class, the teacher has to understand their situation. They need to know what’s going on in their life. For me, teachers have to genuinely care, they have to genuinely care about African American males. The pressure of him (my son) having the capacity to do it, and then again being separated from all his friends who weren't in that AP class, requires encouragement, that’s something he didn't receive from his teacher.

“They (the teachers) are so quick to send Black boys to the alternative schools a.k.a. jail. I think that there just needs to be more of a variety of teachers available to teach, to handle the classes or to try different methods of teaching. The schools need to find someone else who can “handle” and understand black kids. The district has a whole set of Black teachers at the Alternative Learning Center (ALC) who can “handle kids” and understand them. So why not use some of those teachers from the ALC to go into the classrooms at the main campuses to educate them (African American males).”

The mothers collectively acknowledge that there is a wave of new culture coming into the school district. The overall school district is no longer predominantly White. Yet, the curriculum and overall school environment remains Eurocentric. The participants felt like the classroom teachers in this school district were not culturally competent when it comes to educating African American students, particularly males. They also feel that teachers should be compassionate towards all students. The mothers believe their sons deserve to be a part of a learning environment where the classroom teachers are making every day meaningful for all students. Unfortunately, the mothers do not feel that every day was a meaningful learning experience, at least academically for their sons.' They described some of the missed opportunities their sons' have experienced with their White teachers.' Ann describes the frustration she has with a classroom teacher:

Again, I can't stress enough that this is really heartbreaking for me and displeasing on all levels. One of my son's teachers constantly moved his seat around the class from the front of the class, to the back of the class, to next to her, to the principal's office until he was eventually permanently removed from the school. I was upset that the teacher focused so much of her attention on discipline him instead of teaching and engaging him. There needs to be love and compassion in place of teachers complaining about their students. I feel like a lot of white teachers judge Black males and don't really invest in educating them. I really don't think his teachers cared about him or who he was. Some are just uninterested and unhelpful.

Michelle added:

In my experiences with my son's White teachers, I recognized that many of the female teachers don't know how to handle, how to even talk or relate to young

black males, especially the young teachers. They don't know how to just be themselves and build a rapport with the black kids. I found that when my son would speak up in class, the teacher would think that he's was really angry when he was passionate about something, or aggressive when he's just being assertive. The young White teachers are the ones my son use to have the hardest times with. Some of them would misunderstand him when he would speak his mind.

The mothers felt that the classroom environment lacked diversity. They did not recall their son's speaking with enthusing or passion about their favorite subjects, or class. Several mothers felt the lack of diversity or lessons not being culturally relevant caused some of the African American males to be disengaged from instruction. Patricia also referenced that her son learning style was different, the teachers' had a "one size fits all" which did not work for her son. She believes a great deal of White classroom teachers today in are not prepared to teach students of color. Although the mothers accepted the fact that their sons had all White teachers, they wondered how the relationship would be if there were an African American teacher, more specifically, they pondered about the cultural benefits of having an African American teacher.

White Teachers Do Not Treat African American Males Fairly

All of the mothers' shared a classroom experiences about their sons being treated unfairly and there was some undercurrent of being stereotyped. In their narratives, African American males were often viewed as "troublemakers," students who don't follow the school rules, which often resulted in students being removed from their classrooms or school campus. Mother's expressed most of all that teacher complained about petty, insignificant things that went on in the classroom and their sons were being constantly

writing up for doing some the of things their White peers were doing, expanded the situation. Rosa explained,

I constantly received calls from my son's teachers about petty things that he did in the classroom. The teacher would say my son just yells out the answers without being called upon or raising his hand in class; although none of the other students ever raises their hands, she calls on students to reply but never called upon him to answer any questions. He got written up for bursting out answers... I believe my son was punished for doing some of the same things the White students do in the classroom. It's just not fair.

The mothers' expressed too often these minor classroom issues become magnified by teachers to major issues and the unfair treatment towards their sons recurs on a regular basis. Patricia voiced experiences with her son's unfair treatment in the classroom. She believed her son was constantly being singled out for minor things. The teacher made an example out of her son's faults and the consequences were unwarranted and unfair.

She explains,

My sons AP math teacher wrote him up because he was using a pen to do his math homework instead of a pencil. When I contacted the teacher to express my concerns about him getting detention over something petty like using a pen, she began to express how he shouldn't be in the class because he's not organized and his folder is always messy. Other kids in the class sometimes didn't bring their homework or folders to class and she didn't send them to detention. Although other students did the some of the same things.

Patricia further clarified her feeling by saying, "the teacher made a big deal out of nothing, all she had to do was make an announcement to the class to only use pencils and make sure folders are neat, instead of always expose my son's faults and writing him up for small things."

Furthermore, Michelle responds also revealed that some White teachers' preferential treatment is unfair towards African American males. She added,

My son and his friend attend an AP science class together after lunch. They always put aside a piece of fruit or a drink from their lunch to eat after school, before basketball practice. A lot of students would bring food into that class but the teacher would only make them throw theirs away. If my son questioned her or said, "You let other people have food in class," she would send him to the principal's office. The teacher would have written him up for possession of food in the classroom or for his disruptive behavior. This was going on for a while before I intervened. It seemed like the rules only applied toward the only two African American males in the class.

Mothers' felt like that some of the classroom situations did not warrant a discipline referrals and their sons' were treated unfairly compared to their classmates. Ann shares that the conflict between her son and his teacher cause him to withdraw from school altogether. While watching White students interact and get along well with the teacher caused frustrations and isolation for her son which led to discipline problems. Ann shares,

My son didn't get along with one particular White teacher. I believed the teacher really didn't like him. Some students in the class and the teacher thought my son looked like President Obama and they mistreated, and teased him on a daily basis. They would laugh at his ears and say they were big like Obama's ears (long pause), it was a lot of joking and teasing in that particular class and the teacher allowed it all. (Big sigh) It's like the teacher encouraged that type of behavior in the class and even laughed about the comments others made toward my son. Eventually, that led to a lot of disciplinary issues with my son because the teacher wasn't being fair toward disciplining the other students. She allowed my son to be bullied in the classroom and when he got tired of people making fun of him, well, let just say he was the one sent to the office.

When Ann suspected that her son was treated unfairly and being targeted in class because others thought he looked like President Obama, she contacted the teacher. When she spoke to the teacher over the phone, the teacher twisted and turned the blame back on Ann's son and began telling Ann all about the "trouble" her son has caused in the class. Ann said that she felt "hopeless and discouraged."

Zora further explained her feelings of unfair treatment by staying,

The teacher and my son are constantly butting heads. The teacher makes him feel like an outcast. He constantly makes him go outside of the class to have a conversation with him or just leave him in the hallway for long period of time. He is always being disciplined for doing some of the same type of things other students do, but they don't get in trouble for it. If the student is doing the exact same thing in class, don't just punish/discipline one student's, discipline all the students involved. Don't just single out my son, that's not fair.

White Teachers Have Low Expectations for African American Males

In addition to unfair treatment and discipline toward African American males in the classroom, mothers' reported that their sons were held to low academic standards. Mother's' believed African American males in particular are disproportionately labeled as having attention disorders or other disabilities. They also believed the consequence of being labeled, especially about issues of behavior, prevents a student from receiving a "second chance" in which underlying issues remain unaddressed and low expectations follow a student from class to class and grade to grade. These low expectations held by teachers were demonstrated in their remarks and actions towards African American male students.

Rosa shares an experience,

We moved here after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans... our family, especially my son experienced a lot of stereotyping by his White teachers. I felt like they labeled him as problematic... Teachers' assume so much because of that and it really hurts me. Ever since the day started school in this district, it's been hard for him. He was viewed as having behavior issues and recommended to be tested for ADHD. His teachers have never believed in his abilities and tried to enroll him in special education and keep him out of AP classes... Every little thing he has done is on his school record which has followed him from grade to grade and school to school.

Patricia and Rosa both shared that their sons' are always having to prove themselves to their teachers. Patricia shares,

My son was not academically challenged in high school. He was placed in special education which I thought at the time was helpful for him, according to his teacher. However, I didn't believe his teacher had his best interest at heart. He could have done a lot better than he did because he was capable of the doing the work... I believe because the teachers didn't take an interest in him, he was stuck in those special education classes where the teachers had low expectations for him, which caused him to and have low expectations for him.

Patricia also expressed that one of teachers recommend that he graduate with the minimum requirements and began looking into attending a community college, or attend trade school after graduation. She shares, "all I could think of his that they want him to work with his hands."

Joyce further explained her feelings about low expectations of teachers by staying,

I grew up around school teachers, my mother was a teacher and several women in my church...I had all Black teachers before the schools integrated. My teacher lived in my community, came over to our house on weekends, it was a nurturing environment... My son was always an A, B student; however, towards the latter part of the year his grades were not up to par, he began getting a little disinterested and started getting detention for being late to class... Not once did the teacher reach out to him or me to say, is everything okay? How can a teacher have a student for 9 months and not notice a change or just not care?

Joyce shared the experience of how the teachers did not reach out to her son, or contacted his parents when his grades and attendance started to decline. She felt like the teacher had low expectations for her son and did not care about him nor his education. Joyce was not putting all the blame on the teacher for her son's failure, but she could not believe that a teacher would have a student for nine months and not notice any subtle changes in his behavior or grades and not follow-up with the student. Joyce stated, "I grew up in a time believing the existence of schools was to educate and nurture students, that doesn't exist anymore."

Ann believed that the teachers did not expect much from her son. Ann referred to her son's experience in special education unproductive and unstimulating. She adds,

My experience with enrolling my son in special education only handicapped him. I felt like the teachers didn't encourage him or have any expectations for him to succeed. He even complained that the work was too easy and the teachers pretty much did all the work for him. The teacher was not fully utilizing his capabilities and just walking him through the class. He wasn't learning anything.

Ann tried to get her son out of the special education program because the experience was hindering his learning instead of improving. She believes his teachers had low expectations for him and was just passing him along. This whole experience was heartbreaking for Ann to watch her son go through.

Zora experienced her son teacher's had low expectations for him as far as his academics were concerned. She shares,

I believe that the teachers were more concerned about not letting him play sports if his "classroom behavior" was not acceptable than his grades. I felt like most of the teachers have low expectations for athletes than non-athletes. His teachers never encouraged him to keep his grades up overall, they only threaten him that if he misbehaved in their classrooms, the coach would be informed (long pause) which translated to, he would not be able to play in the upcoming school games.

Based on conversations Zora had with teachers, they were more concerned with him cooperating in the classroom and not giving them any trouble, instead of him keeping his grades up to be eligible to play sports. She felt like his teachers assumed he cared more about playing the sport than his academics.

Summary

Hearing the voices of these middle-income African American mothers responding to their sons' secondary experience with White teachers is an attempt to finding solutions for closing the achievement gap in affluent urban communities between African American males and their White counterparts. The mothers shared experience of what is happening to middle-income African American males in secondary urban classrooms. Each mother shared their distress by the experiences their sons encountered. The overlap in narratives highlights there are issues in the urban school district that does exist and need immediate attention. These mothers felt like they were in battle at times dealing with teachers mistreating their sons. They shared their narratives with laughter and humor, but also with tears from the pain that occurred with the experience.

The study shows that African American males had several negative experiences of teacher mistreatment, low teacher expectations, White teachers not understanding them and their culture and lack of a positive relationship with their White teachers. This study also reveals the actions the mothers took to advocate for their sons fair treatment in the urban classrooms. The mothers did not hesitate to intervene when necessary. Mothers advocacy efforts included attending parent-teacher conferences, meeting with school counselor, meeting with the principal, getting the school board involved, moving their son out of the class into another class, being actively present in the classroom during instruction, having cameras placed into the classroom and moving their son to a different school in the same district.

Giving a voice to middle-income African American mothers is significantly important due to the historical negative images and perception of these mothers. This study also negates the negative perceptions of African American mothers by showing the unique challenges they encounter when raising African American males in middle-income affluent communities. Additionally, it offers an insight into the experiences of secondary urban classrooms with White teachers to assist in improving the academic achievement for African American males as agents of change and equality.

Impact of Mothers' Roles as Advocates

The participants all have a close relationship with their sons and communicated daily with them about how school was going. They shared how they encouraged their sons and gave them advice on how to handle certain situations with their teachers. For example, the participants stated they usually check their sons' grades online sporadically. For the most part, they let their sons' monitor their grades online themselves and they usually will keep them apprised of any situations that may occur if needed. Zora gave an example about letting her son be in control over his grades. When her son received his six-week progress report card, they noticed one of his grades were low. Instead of Zora contacting the teacher immediately, she encouraged him to speak with the teacher to resolve the issue. The teacher was not aware of the mistake she makes when putting in his grades. Instead of putting in 100 points into her grade book, she only inserted 10. This situation was resolved without Zora having to contact the teacher.

When the mothers' communicated with their sons' or the teacher, their input mattered, it impacted the outcomes of certain situations. The participants shared that being an advocate for their sons have helped their sons' mature. Michelle stated:

I think my role has a positive impacted because we have gone through these same issues you know, since elementary. I have definitely made my son more vocal about standing up for his rights and he's a stronger person.

These mothers often requested meetings with teachers and school administrators. They followed the chain of command when necessary to express their disapproval of things regarding their son. Their involvement helped diffuse a lot tensed situations between their sons and their White teachers. Several of the mothers were not afraid to challenge some of the incidents that conflicted with the best interest for their sons.'

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study depicts the voices of six middle-income African American Mothers describing their sons' experiences with teachers in urban secondary classrooms. This study will provide insights into middle-income mothers' thoughts, experiences, beliefs, or rationalize the process in which they advocate on their sons' behalf. Although a lot of research focuses on low-income single mothers, much less attention had been dedicated on the how middle-income African American mothers describe the interactions and impact White teachers have with their sons and how these mothers advocate on behalf of their sons. The following research questions served as a guide for this examination:

1. How do middle-income African American mothers describe interactions between their sons and their son's White teachers in a predominantly White urban secondary classroom?
2. How do African American mothers describe the impact of their role as an advocate for their sons in white urban secondary classrooms?
3. How do African American mothers describe and exercise parental advocacy for their sons in predominantly white secondary urban classrooms?

Throughout the nation, institutional racism occurs in the educational system and in society (Ladson-Billings, 2010). Even with the progress made during the past sixty years, urban middle-income African American males have continuously lagged behind their counterparts in achievement in urban schools where they often times have the same social, cultural and economic capital as their White peers. Subsequently, obtaining urban

middle-income status does not exclude African American males from having negative experiences that impact their educational success (Williams, 2009).

Ethic of Care, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought was used to support my research questions and used as a guide when interpreting or creating the meaning of the experiences African American mothers' described about their sons' in secondary urban classrooms.

Semi-structured interviews were structured in a conversational style interview to probe deeply into the narratives and counter-stories provided by the participants. This study unsilenced the voices of middle-income African American mothers' and allowed a greater understanding of how they describe the impact of their role as an advocate for their sons.' Each individual interview was audio taped. The data was transcribed within a 24-hour period of the interview. The data was analyzed from the participants and was compared to each other to develop themes. Each emerging themes were confirmed and furthered examined through written field notes and nonverbal cues that aided in categorizing the themes.

The Ethic of Care guided my research questions discovers how African American mothers' describe the type of interactions between their sons' and their White teachers. The narratives provided a greater understanding of how the interactions with White teachers impacted their academic achievement.

The Ethic of Care framed my question in understanding what type of teacher-student interactions occurred in urban secondary classrooms and how the undeveloped relationships with African American males hindered their academic success.

Critical Race Theory encourages the use of narratives, counter-stories, and scenarios to support the unfair treatment and culturally insensitive curriculum that African American males encounter daily in urban schools. Black Feminist Thought helped to observe the impact of advocacy among middle-income African American mothers' and how they exercise their parental role as an advocate for their sons'.

Discussions of Findings

To examine African American mothers' narratives about their sons' experiences in secondary urban schools, the mothers' were asked to describe experiences of interaction with their sons' White teachers. The middle-income African American mothers describe their experience as "it has been a struggle, this was a terrible experience for my son, and I feel like I've been on a battlefield for my son."

The overarching concern here is to have fair treatment and equality education for African American students and to close the achievement gap among African American males and their White counterparts. It was important to share the background information of the participants to defy many of the stereotypes often depicting African American mothers' as single heads of households, poor, low literate and uninvolved in their child's education. This study is not generalizing the experiences of the six participants to all African American mothers' experiences, however, it is specific to a certain middle-income affluent urban community. This chapter will discuss the categories and themes that emerged in the subsequent sections.

Research Question One

African American mothers' responses to research question one: "How do middle-income African American mothers describe interactions between their son's and their sons' White teachers in urban secondary classrooms?" According to the data, the mothers voiced are represented in the form of five emergent themes, which are (1) interactions with White teachers,' (2) lack of care towards African American males, (3) lack of diversity and culturally competent teachers in classrooms, (4) how White teachers' preferential treatment is unfair, and (5) low expectations held by the teachers.

Interactions with White Teachers

Six of the mothers describe either unpleasant or hostile interactions with their sons' teachers. One parent noted the unwelcoming introduction her child was given in his advanced placement classes by the teachers who warned him immediately about the workload. The parent and student perceived a lack of faith by the teachers in her son's ability to complete the required tasks for the class. The participants described numerous negative interactions their sons had with their teachers, however, they did note that their sons failed to receive positive interactions. Their sons also did not enjoy the meaningful relationships and positive interactions that other students enjoyed with their teachers. This lack of meaningful relationships becomes more prevalent in situations where students and their families may be experiencing problems. One mother stated, "It was as if my child was being discarded the minute he got into trouble". Often times teachers will gravitate to students who are doing well academically, are not problematic and have a commonality with the teachers. The mothers indicated that in the classroom where their sons did not

have any issues with the teacher, there was no personal connection, no relationship formed. They felt like their son was just a number in the class.

Lack of Care, Diversity, and Culturally Competent Teachers

The participants felt like the teachers really did not take an interest in their sons. The mothers described the teachers as “not really caring about them”, “not wanted the best for them”, and “not understanding who they are.” Joyce describes her son’s teacher as:

“She didn't understand who he was as her student and I don't think she even gave a hoot. I was trying to ask her if she could alternate the style in which she taught and she just talked over me. It was basically, “teaching is my job and either you get it or you don't.”

Ann felt like some of the teacher did not care if her son learned or not. Additionally, the participants felt like the curriculum was boring and lacking in cultural relevance. Joyce son was frustrated when his teacher would not clearly explain certain concepts when asked. She would continue to explain it the same way she did before, causing him and other students to become disengaged from the instruction.

Overall, the classroom environment for their sons was not engaging, fun or interesting. Participants felt like the teachers never embraced their culture into the curriculum nor used relevant illustrations from their culture. In the classroom was an undercurrent of disrespect towards African American males. The mothers expressed that their sons’ viewpoints were not valued and often misunderstood. They often felt like the teachers did not understand them nor their culture. Rosa, Zora, and Michelle all expressed that because their sons were athletes they were considered “troublemakers” in the class. Rosa shares,

The teacher told me that her class has “all the basketball kids” in one class. she then said, “they are so distracting, I tried separating them by moving their seats and they are still disruptive, they drive me crazy!” I was doing all I could to get my son removed from her class because I heard in her voice the frustration, anger and discuss and I thought to myself (pause) how is my son going to learn in an environment where he’s not valued and the teacher can’t handle the students.

All of the mothers would have preferred if their sons had at least one African American teacher in secondary school. The participant felt like an African American teacher would have a better understanding of what it is like to be an African American in and could relate to some of the issues African American males face in today’s society.

How White Teachers' Preferential Treatment is Unfair

Overwhelmingly, all of the participants voiced their experiences related to their sons' teachers preferential unfair treatment. The participant expressed concerns about their sons constantly being singled out and mistreated over any other group of students in the classroom. Patricia expresses,

I felt like the teacher showed favoritism towards White students. My son would do some of the exact same things as his White students did in the class and he would be labeled as the troublemaker. It was getting to the point where even the White students would tell the teacher that she was tripping because of your unfair treatment towards the Black students.

The mother's also believed teachers, mistreated their sons, over disciplined them which lead to unfair judgment. The participants also believed the teachers were writing their sons up for minor infractions. The mother felt like some teacher “just did not like” their sons. Michelle revealed that a student in the class would ask to go to the restroom

and when they returned her son would ask if he could go to the restroom and the teacher said no. No explanation was made, her body gesture and tone indicated to him, not the questioned her authority. The mothers shared stories about how their sons were unfairly targeted for misbehavior acts. Michelle expressed that her son was in the school halls laughing and joking with other students during passing time, a teacher monitoring the halls at the time singled him out and wrote him up for being disruptive.

All the participants describe emotional stories about unfair treatment from their sons' White teachers. In addition to unfair treatment, some of the African American males were placed in alternative learning centers. Five of the six participants' sons had attended alternative learning centers (ALC). The mothers disliked sending their sons' to an alternative school. They became very emotional talking about the experience and thought of it as a "prison" for Black male students. The behavior that was reported did not warrant sending their sons to alternative school. The mothers felt like their sons were sent to alternative schools for non-violent or non-criminal offenses because of the "zero tolerance discipline policies" enforced by the school district. These mothers shared in the disappointment and pain to see their sons walk through metal detectors with their hands held up, pockets searched or pulled outside of their pants and being physically patted down as they enter into the alternative schools daily. They felt these minor offenses that their sons were accused of did not warrant them to be placed in alternative schools. Joyce said, "That's a place I don't ever want my son to attend again. It was a horrible experience for me."

The Alternative Surprise

Four of the five mothers observed that once their sons got used to the routine of attending the alternative school, their sons had a good relationship with the teachers'. The teachers at the alternative school called their sons by their names, treated them with respect, and were not afraid to show affection. They were placed in smaller classrooms where the teacher could recognize their talents, valued their race and culture and took the time to get to know their sons. These teachers generally took an interest in their son's education and encouraged them to be successful in the program. Zora expressed that the school district main campuses should employ more teachers like the ones who taught at the alternative schools. Most of the teachers who taught at the alternative school were African American and saw potential in their sons. These African American teachers demonstrated to the African American males that schooling can be a positive and nurturing experience.

Low Expectations and Deficit Model Thinking from White Teachers

In all of the challenges associated with low expectations and deficit model thinking from White teachers were exposed through CRT. All the mothers expressed they had high expectations for their sons academically. However, the mothers felt like their sons were not held to the same expectations by their White teachers. Additional, the mothers expressed concerned that White teachers did not have the same expectation levels for their sons as they did for other students in the class. Carter (2005) contests deficit thinking would refer to the beliefs teachers hold in relation to urban African American students (Williams, 2009). The African American mothers believed their sons had the potential to

succeed in the classrooms, however, the teacher constantly questioned whether their sons could perform at high levels by suggesting they enter into lower level classes. Rosa stated:

The teacher always had negative things to say about my son. She always made it seem like he was this horrible person who did not deserve to be in her class... She would never give a direct answer or go into details as to why he shouldn't be in the AP class, besides saying he talks too much. She always complained about his behavior, she questioned his work, she was really trying to lower his self-esteem in believing he couldn't perform well in her class. After months of constant negativity, he started believing he could do the work and eventually, he was removed from the class.

These mothers realized that they had to constantly be an advocate for their sons and believe in them when their teachers had low expectations for them. Michelle added, "if the teachers don't believe the kids can perform well in their class, then they won't." It was vital for these mothers to be in communication with their teachers to ensure them that their sons' were capable of performing at high levels.

As stated before, the participants speculated how it would be if their son had an African American teacher who would understand them as an individual and make the instruction more relevant to African American male issues.

Research Question Two

Research question two asks: "How do African American mothers describe the impact of their role as an advocate for their sons in White urban secondary classroom?" According to the data, the mothers described their roles as advocates by having (a) parental presence and being involved and (b) mother empowerment by letting their voices be heard.

Parental Presence — Being Involved

Being an advocate was the central theme during all of the interviews. Each participant indicated that their presence and care for their sons was important to them.

Six out of the six participants made sure that they were present at the open house, freshman orientation, every meet the teacher, conference, school meeting, and school activity that involved their sons.’ They were very adamant about responding to every letter, email, and phone from the teacher concerning their sons’ academics and behavior. All of the participants noted that her husbands would also attend meetings to show the teachers and administrators that their son has supportive parents at home who are invested in making sure their son is successful academically.

The participants did not want their sons’ teachers, administrators or the school in general to assume any negative stereotypes about their son or his family. Although their sons are attending predominately White middle-income schools, that does not mean that the teacher always viewed the mothers to be educated, involved, married and available to assist in the academic success of their son's. The African American mothers’ all expressed when they visited the school they were well dressed and articulated with authority and genuinely showed concern for their sons’ education. Michelle describes the impact she had as an advocate for her son by constantly meeting with the teacher, school counselor and administrators on behalf of her son. By actively being involved and demanding resolutions for the teacher’s mistreatment of her son, she was able to assist in getting the teacher removed from the classroom.

Mother Empowerment — Voices Being Heard

Two out of the six participants was fully aware of their parental rights and the rights of the sons as a student in the district. These mothers took full advantage of their

rights and challenged the schools and teacher when necessary. The mothers knew how to have their voices heard by following the chain of command. Zora stated,

I always made sure the teacher knew I was aware of my son's rights and mine as a parent. I always made sure I took my concerns to the teacher first, then the principal and when necessary I contacted the district superintendent's office. I knew the step in how to resolve issues and I exercised them regularly.

Michelle husband worked as an administrator in the neighboring school district and was aware of rights and procedures to take when advocating for their son. All of the mothers voiced their concerns when advocating for their sons on the school level. However, the results and outcomes varied by knowing their rights. Some mothers were intimidated by the school because they did not know what rights or options that were available to them and the school did not disclose that information to them.

Patricia and Ann said in hindsight, "if I knew what I know now, I would not have enrolled my son in special education." During that time, they were unaware of the rights they had as a parent and other options that were available to their sons. By advocating for fairness in the classroom for her son, Zora was able to get his suspension reduced. These mothers express how imperative it is to be an advocate and have their voices be heard on behalf of their sons. They believe it is essential to improve the educational experience for their sons.

Research Question Three

Research question three asked: "How do African American mothers describe and exercise parental advocacy for their son's in predominantly White secondary urban

schools?” According to the data, the mothers express (a) being proactive with classroom support in advanced placement classes and (b) advocacy mission being visible.

Proactive — Classroom Support in Advanced Placement Classes

Three of the six participants said they felt that the most challenging class for their sons were the advanced placement course. These classes were not challenging because of the rigorous coursework; however, participants indicated it was challenging because the White teacher did not want their sons’ in the class. Michelle stated,

The teacher kept suggesting that he be moved down to the general on-level classes, not because they were not capable of doing the coursework, but because of petty things that happen in class. She (the teacher) literally did not want my son in her class. She did not want any African American males in her class. She gave my son and all the African American males a hard time, it was the worst school experience one could possibly have. Eventually, I had to go to the district on her and have cameras put into the classroom.

The mothers’ held the school and teachers accountable for the academic success for their sons’ which often meant getting the school board involved. The mothers’ understood during the secondary school years for their sons’, their role as an advocate was as just as critical as the primary years. Michelle also stated, “It was a very difficult year for us, the teacher tried everything to get him out of her class from putting him out of the class, constantly writing him up and complaining to us via email. I was so stressed out and so angry that she was mistreating my child.”

Advocacy Mission — Visibility

The African American mothers' all spoke as if they were on a mission to advocate for their sons'. As their sons' were confronted daily with unfair experiences in the classrooms, these mothers' made sure their voices were heard by often approaching the teachers,' counselors and administrators with their concerns. All of the mothers' interventions and interactions with the school and teachers illustrated that they will stand up for fair treatment on behalf of their sons.' By advocating on behalf of their sons' Michelle was able to get cameras into the classroom which stop the harassment of her son. In addition, she was able to remove certain items off of her son's school records. Zora's son was able to see how her advocating on his behalf gave him the ability to self-advocate. While advocating for fair treatment, Patricia was able to keep her son in AP classes and her son was able to exempt from taking the college placement test. Michelle was distressed over the preferential treatment from the teachers, by advocating for fair treatment, she was to have cameras placed in the classroom to avoid further mistreatment towards her son. By exercising their parental advocacy, these mothers' actions at school served as a role model for their sons to self-advocate in future situations.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to hear the voices of middle-income African American mothers. Despite the numerous denial that race is a factor in our society and schools, this study is an attempt to offer another view on addressing the concerns of the achievement gap among African American males. There is a plethora of research on achievement gap of African American males and their low- income parents, in urban

settings. However, this study focuses on middle-income African American families living in affluent primary White communities and have exposure to cultural capital which has enhanced their son's educational experiences.

These middle-income African American mothers and their families purposefully made decisions to increase the quality of life for their sons. However, in selecting this school district mothers communicated their sons have experienced racism, exclusion and unfair treatment in the classroom. Mothers advocated for their sons and supported them through painful realizations that their teachers held negative perceptions of them and failed to recognize or embrace their rich cultural heritage that they bring to the classroom.

Recommendations

1. At the present time, many urban school districts have more personnel within their police departments than their counseling center. School districts must allocate more personnel and resources towards their counseling department in order to identify challenges which may be hindering the academic achievement of African American students.
2. School district must train the staff on deescalating tactics in order to avoid students being suspended or arrested from problems initiated by minuscule issues. Often time's teachers can address a minor incident in the classroom and prevent it from escalating into a major problem, which would require the presence of district police. The majority of the mothers had students who were suspended and or sent to the district's alternative school or minor infractions that could have been addressed at the school e.g. in school suspension. Cultural

sensitivity and cultural awareness training must be implemented if teachers are to understand the importance of deescalating incidents that may not fully comprehend or interpret correctly.

3. School district should revamp their policies that call for the arrest of student and the indictment of charges through the local prosecutor's office.
4. Train teachers in and require the use of culturally responsive teaching practices while instilling a belief in the capacity for African American students to learn at high levels of instruction. Several of the mothers noted that their sons were removed from advanced classes and placed in low level track classes.
5. Schools must hire more teachers and counselor of color. The vast majority of teachers in the district are White. These teachers lack an understanding of the environment, community, family life, culture, learning styles, and learning capacity of African American students. African American educators may hold a greater affinity with African American students. They are more likely to understand the behavioral patterns of African American students in the classroom which are often incorrectly interpreted as lazy, negative, unfocused, and unmotivated.

Implications for Future Research

1. Replica the study with mothers and whose sons are enrolled in a Charter School, Private or Parochial School. This would help reveal whether or not parents are having similar perceptions and experiences with their sons' teachers.

2. Replicate the study using mothers of Caucasian students enrolled in the same school district. Such a study would help distinguish the experiences of Caucasian students from African American students, noting any similarities or differences. It would also help to identify whether or not Caucasian students receive favorable treatment or have established more meaningful relationships with their teachers.
3. Interview high school teachers from the same district to identify their perceptions of African American male students. This can shed light on how teachers view these students with regards to their behavioral styles, cooperation, motivation, and capacity to learn.
4. Replicate the study with mothers and fathers working with a White teacher of Latino students. Numerous studies have placed African American and Latino students under the category of students of color, particularly when it comes to academic achievement challenges. Such a study will give insight on whether mothers of Latino male students are having positive interactions with their son's teacher and whether they hold favorable views of these teachers.
5. Replicate the study using mothers of African American males in middle and elementary schools. This will identify any patterns in teacher/son and teacher/parent relationships that may be beneficial or detrimental to the academic achievement for the students.

6. Replicated the study with African American mothers and fathers working together with teachers in a collective advocacy for African American male students in urban secondary schools. Perhaps

Summary

While the achievement gap has been closed, the disparity which remains is one that should alarm parents, teachers, administrators, and all stakeholders within the educational arena. Hence, the present achievement gap and low academic achievement for African American students, particularly African American males, should be a cause for alarm for all of America. We must ask ourselves as a society if the continued educational failure and marginality for African American students will remain acceptable or we reverse this sad trend and uplift/educate the totality of our masses. Dyce (2013) states “it is time for concerned constituencies to conduct a careful examination of the socio-cultural, political, and economic consequences of an education system that is failing a large segment of the American populace” (165). The prevalent educational hegemony existing within our schools must come to end if we are to develop and uplift ourselves. African American students do not hold cultural deficits leading to underachievement in schools but rather one who is underperforming due to deficit schools and teachers.

It is detrimental that two of the most important factors (parent and teacher) for school success for African American male students can be odds with one another in instances that are critical for the student. Parental involvement is vital to the success of teacher instruction and interactions in the classroom. However, the role of the teacher cannot be minimized with or without this parental involvement. “Educators can play a

significant role in transforming potentially negative situations into positive school experiences among urban youth” (Vega, Moore, Miranda, 2015). Teachers hold a great deal of influence on students that have a great impact in their future. Understanding the culture of African American student and being sensitive to that culture can diminish a significant number of problems that occur in the classroom. Meaningful relationships promote meaningful work and also alleviate crisis when they originate or rather keep the crisis from occurring. Teacher must advocate for their students by establishing those relationships with them and their parents. They must also embrace the advocacy of the mothers whose voices have been heard in this study.

The researcher believes that this study adds to the literature by highlighting the advocacy role of the mothers. These mothers have fought for equitable educational opportunities on behalf of their son's and have assisted in helping their sons overcome unfair and negative classroom experiences. This study indicated that these mothers generally care about their sons and have high expectations for them to be successful. It is the researcher greatest hope that educators will recognize the voices of the mother's and take their concerns into consideration when addressing these major issues of African American male students.

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APPENDIX A

Preliminary guiding questions for the in person or phone interview:

1. Do you identify yourself as a middle income African American?
2. Are you married? Does your spouse live in the same household as you?
3. Do you live in the community within the attendance zone of the selected school district located in the northwest Houston, TX area?
4. Do you have at least one son attending high school in the selected school district located in the northwest Houston, TX area?

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol - Guiding interview questions for participants in the study will be in person:

Research Question 1

1. Tell me about your sons' experiences in school.
2. Does he have White teachers in his classrooms?
3. In your thinking, what is the relationship like between your son and his White teachers?
4. Can you think of any experiences with your son and his teachers that stand-out in your mind?
 - Do you believe your son experienced any difficulties in the classroom?
 - What do you believe were the reasons for the difficulties?
5. Overall, how do you feel about their interactions in the classroom?
6. How do your son's teachers describe their beliefs or opinions about him?
 - What have they done to show or demonstrate how they feel about him or their beliefs about him?

Research Question 2

7. How would you define "advocate?"
8. How do you define "advocate as a mother" for your son in school?
9. Why do you feel you need (or do not need) to be an advocate for your son?
 - (If so - what do you do or how do you show or demonstrate that you are an advocate?
10. Can you share an experience that demonstrates when you had to be an advocate?

Research Question 3

11. Can you share any experiences when your role as an advocate had an impact?
 - What happened?
 - What did you do?
 - What was the result (positive or negative examples, if possible)?